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# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

APRIL 2005

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Cover: The Renovated Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House and Cultural Centre; inset: Swamiji's Birthplace

उत्तिष्ठत  
जाग्रत  
प्राप्य  
वरान्निबोधत ।

# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Vol. 110

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No. 4

## ⇒ Traditional Wisdom ⇌

APRAMĀDA: VIGILANCE

प्रणवो धनुः शरो ह्यात्मा ब्रह्मा तल्लक्ष्यमुच्यते ।  
अप्रमत्तेन वेद्वयं शरवत्तन्मयो भवेत् ॥

Om is the bow, the self the arrow; and Brahman is said to be the target. It is to be struck with an undistracted mind; the self should become one with Brahman, as the arrow with its mark. (*Mundaka Upanishad*, 2.2.4)

तां योगमिति मन्यन्ते स्थिरामिन्द्रियधारणाम् ।  
अप्रमत्तस्तदा भवति योगो हि प्रभवाप्ययौ ॥

This, the firm control of the senses, is what is called yoga. One must then be vigilant; for yoga is subject to growth and decay. (*Katha Upanishad*, 2.3.11)

अप्पमादरतो भिक्खु पमादे भयदस्सि वा ।  
अफब्बो परिहानाय निब्बानस्येव सन्तिके ॥

A mendicant who delights in vigilance, who looks with fear on thoughtlessness (who sees danger in it), cannot fall away (from his perfect state) (but) is in the presence of nirvana. (*Dhammapada*, 2.32)

It is the nature of the monkey to jump from branch to branch, holding a fruit in its mouth, and while jumping, the fruit often falls down from its mouth. Thus at times, distracted by the changing events of life the aspirants lose sight of the devotional path, if the grasp is not firm. (*The Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*, 586)

He that does not shun small defects falls little by little into greater. (*The Imitation of Christ*, 1.25)

When the novices forget their *dhikr* (remembrance of God) for one moment, then Satan is with them, for Satan spies upon them. So when forgetfulness enters the heart, then he enters, but when the *dhikr* enters certainly he will depart. (Ibn 'Arabi)

## This Month

Personal ideals are one of the most potent determinants of successful goal-directed activity, underpinning even the mundane acts of commonplace people. This month's editorial, **Practical Idealism**, dwells on this theme.

In **Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago** we get excerpts from two addresses of the reputed American clerics Lyman Abbott and Cuthbert Hall that provide a stringent auto-critique of dogmatic Christian theology and contrast it with the vibrant spirituality of the East.

In this month's instalment of **Reflections on the Bhagavadgita** Swami Atulanandaji elucidates the last eleven verses of Chapter Eleven of the Gita, containing the vision of Sri Krishna's benevolent form and a description of the means to its realization.

In the second and concluding instalment of **Vedanta in Practice** Srimat Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj describes the significant philosophical and practical differences that set apart Swami Vivekananda's formulation of 'seva' from the traditional ideal of karma yoga. He traces the roots of Swamiji's ideal to the Gita and the Upanishads, and emphasizes how this Vedantic ideal is not only the genuine basis of ethics and harmony but can also be the foundation for a truly egalitarian and humane social order.

**Sri Sarada Devi: A Living Illustration of Practical Vedanta** is an absorbing account of the ways in which Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi actually lived the principles and ideals of Vedanta amidst her numerous daily chores. Br Ajatachaitanyaaji, a monastic member of the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Purulia, and Sri M M Barik, a teacher of national

repute from Ramakrishna Mission, Along, Arunachal Pradesh, have jointly authored the article.

**Individual Being and the Universal Being** is a lucid exposition of the philosophical tenets of Sankhya and Vedanta in the context of practical spirituality. The author, Swami Pitambaranandaji, is a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order.

In **Science in Religion**, Dr Saibal Gupta discusses the empirical and rational basis of Sankhya and Vedanta as systems of practical spirituality vis-à-vis the method of the material sciences, and correlates these concepts with our as yet nebulous objective understanding of consciousness and evolution. The author is a reputed cardiovascular surgeon and well-known thinker from Kolkata.

**Discourse and Pragmatism: A Gandhian Perspective** is a succinct presentation of Gandhiji's practical approach in formulating ideas like satyagraha, swadeshi and swaraj that have had a revolutionary impact on society. The author, Dr Sumita Roy, is Reader, Department of English, Osmania University, Hyderabad.

The ninth instalment of **Parabrahma Upaniṣad**, translated by Swami Atmapriyanandaji, Principal, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur, describes the internalization of the sacred thread, viewed as Brahman, during the process of sannyasa.

The high ideal of sannyasa, the one-pointed mind of the knowers of Brahman, and their transcendence of social conventions are graphically reflected in Mathuradasji, the subject of our **Glimpses of Holy Lives**.

# Practical Idealism

## EDITORIAL

### The Paradox of the Ideal

**M**ā *hirīsyāt sarva bhūtāni*, hurt no creature, is a central dictum of Sanatana Hindu Dharma, which considers ahimsa as *parama*, or supreme, dharma. According to Bhagavan Vyasa, 'Ahimsa is to abstain from injuring any being, at any time and in any manner. Truth and other forms of restraints and observances are based on the spirit of non-injury. They, being the means of fulfilment of non-injury, have been recommended in the shastras for establishing ahimsa.'<sup>1</sup>

Ahimsa (*pāṇātipāta veramani* in Pali) is the first of the five moral precepts, *pañca-sīla*, incumbent upon all Buddhists who have taken the *triśaranya*, the vows of triple refuge. The *prāṇātipāta viramaya vrata* of Jaina laymen is also very elaborate: 'I will desist from destroying all great lives such as Trasa jīva (i.e. lives of two, three, four and five senses), either knowingly or intentionally. ... As long as I live I shall not myself kill; nor cause others to kill; nor will I kill by mind, speech or body.'<sup>2</sup> The Jaina code of conduct includes prescriptions (like avoiding eating after sunset) to aid the fulfilment of the vow of ahimsa.

Pragmatic opinion, however, tells us that ahimsa in the absolute sense is an impossibility. In the words of Swami Brahmananda:

You understand its significance only when you have attained samadhi, when you have reached enlightenment and have seen God in all creatures. Until then no amount of talk helps us. ... You may talk of not killing any creature but can you possibly avoid killing? What would you eat? Potatoes? Plant that potato underground, it shoots forth young sprouts. Has the potato no life? ... You must breathe to live. Yet with every breath you kill millions of creatures.<sup>3</sup>

The proponents of ahimsa are also vigorous

promoters of vegetarianism. But Manu terms agriculture *pramṛta*, pre-eminent in loss of life,<sup>4</sup> for tilling causes the death of numerous burrowing creatures.<sup>5</sup>

The Sermon on the Mount is one of the most beautiful ethical passages in the Bible. It is, however, a counsel of perfection, and few Christians believe in one's ability to be perfect during an entire lifetime; and so these exhortations are taken as only ideals to be looked up to. Other interpreters suggest that Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of heaven being at hand meant that these precepts were to be obeyed only for a short time.

St. Francis of Assisi, the *poverello* ('poor little man'), is one of the most loved and venerated of Christian saints. He initiated the movement of evangelical poverty with the rule that prohibited his followers from having any private possessions. Yet, St Francis had to himself whittle down this rule, much against his own wishes, to suit other Franciscans, and after his demise the conventional Franciscans undertook further revisions of the rule to suit modern community life.

Islam is the one religious movement wherein the spiritual and socio-political aspects of the lives of its followers are considered inextricably linked from the very beginning; for in Islam the religious community, ummah, is commissioned by Allah to form a society based on the value systems divinely ordained in the Quran. Since the revelation of the Quran was complete with the demise of Muhammad, the rules of social governance in Islamic societies have also remained fixed, for unlike secular laws, these rules cannot be altered to suit one's current needs. To confirm modern social practices to the ideal of the Quran is a vexed issue in all modern Islamic societies.

The aforementioned instances highlight the paradox of the ideal: the ideals of ahimsa, of moral perfection, of non-possession, and of a divine society appeal to our hearts, but we are bound to ask the very next moment—is it practicable?

### **What is Practicality?**

Pragmatic and utilitarian motives are often assumed to be the basis of our commonsensical, rational behaviour. Our pragmatic self judges the validity of an idea or a proposed course of action by asking two questions: (1) Is it workable? Can we put the idea into practice in our workaday world? (2) Is it of any use, or, do the ends suit us? Conversely, if we set our minds on some end we take practicality to lie in the achievement of that end, by whatever possible expedient. Getting things done and achieving results, then, is the common conception of practicality.

It is in the formulation of our ends that we take into account utilitarian concerns that judge the validity of goals by the amount of happiness they are likely to yield. Happiness or pleasure may vary in quality from gross sensual pleasures to the subtle spiritual ones, but the quest for ananda, or happiness, is universally acknowledged by philosophers and psychologists as the prime determinant of our actions.

By summing up these propositions we can conclude that we are likely to act in ways that are the easiest means to happiness, or, in more commonplace idiom, that which we like and can do, is practical. Unfortunately, we run into problems when we interpret happiness and expedites only in sensual and material terms. Vedanta points out that both happiness and will are derivatives of Consciousness, for only conscious entities possess these attributes. Any effort, therefore, at pursuit of happiness, without reference to one's inherent Consciousness, is only likely to end in a travesty of the same. By the same token, we look for external contrivances only when we are unaware of

our own Self as the perennial and inexhaustible internal source of power that not only initiates all our actions, but is also waiting to be tapped.

Genuine pragmatism lies in our tapping our own internal source of power and happiness and in putting these derivatives to efficient use. Being aware of our own resources is the first step in this process. Simple awareness of our internal selves can be profoundly transformative for two reasons: (1) This awareness, of necessity, focuses our minds, and a focused mind is a spontaneous conduit of the power and bliss of Atman that are waiting to be manifested. The empirical efficacy of the techniques of mindfulness and choiceless awareness are dependent on this fact. (2) True knowledge is in itself a source of power, for it is knowledge that is transformed into the will that determines our actions. Thus if technological advancements are the pragmatic tests of the validity of scientific knowledge, they must needs be preceded by the discoveries of pure science.

This awareness brings us to the realm of ideas, and the power of valid ideas and ideals. In making available the Vedantic truth of the Upanishads to the masses, Swami Vivekananda was banking on the power of Self-awareness to invigorate and empower them. 'This Atman is first to be heard of,' said Swamiji, echoing the exhortation of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*.

Hear day and night that you are that Soul. ... Let the whole body be full of that one ideal, 'I am the birthless, the deathless, the blissful, the omniscient, the omnipotent, ever-glorious Soul.' ... Meditate upon it, and out of that will come work. 'Out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaketh,' and out of the fullness of the heart the hand worketh also. Action will come. Fill yourselves with the ideal; whatever you do, think well on it. All your actions will be magnified, transformed, deified, by the very power of thought. If matter is powerful, thought is omnipotent.<sup>6</sup>

### **What Do We Actually Practice?**

Vasudha Narayanan is a Professor of Re-

ligion at the University of Florida. Participating in a debate on valid representations of Hinduism (the seminar was titled 'Who Speaks for Hinduism?') in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, she wrote:

Several years ago, when I first came as a graduate student to the Centre for the Study of World Religions at Harvard University, a fellow student down the corridor kindly loaned me a few introductory textbooks on the Hindu tradition. I read them with considerable interest, and when I returned them, he asked me what I thought of them. With some hesitation—this was my first week at Harvard—I replied that none of them discussed some important features of the tradition.

When asked to expand, I said the first thing that came to my mind: 'Food,' I said and continued, 'my grandmother always made the right kind of lentils for our festivals. The auspicious kind. We make certain vegetables and lentils for happy and celebratory holy days and others for the inauspicious ceremonies like ancestral rites and death rituals. And none of the books mentioned auspicious and inauspicious times.'

'Oh,' said my new friend, 'anthropological stuff.'

Disconcerted at having my grandmother's practice of what I thought of as a religious life being so dismissed as 'anthropological stuff' and mindful that this was Harvard, I quickly changed the topic and asked him what *he* was studying.

'Religion,' he said briefly and added, 'the Vedas.'

We were on, or so I thought, a safe topic. I did know one or two of the hymns that were an integral part of rituals at home and temples. I could even recite some of the verses with the right intonation. So I happily pressed him for details.

'I'm working on Vrtra now,' he said.

My heart sank—I had never heard of Vrtra before. I did muster up the courage to ask him about Vrtra—maybe Vrtra was known by some other name. The student proceeded to tell me the story of Vrtra, the dragon-monster that held the rain clouds until Indra finally plunged into its belly and set the rain free.

'That is Hinduism?' I asked incredulously.

'No,' he replied seriously, 'that is the Rig Veda.'...

The Hindu tradition, like many other religions, is complex, and diglossia is rampant. There are clear distinctions between androcentric Sanskrit texts and practice. ... None of this was wrong; it was just that the epic stories, the variations of the stories, the varieties of devotional activity, the celebrations of festivals, and the fuss about food seem far more important than doctrine and philosophy in the practice of Hindu traditions.<sup>7</sup>

This very point had earlier been made by Prof A L Basham, the editor of *A Cultural History of India*, when he decided to add a postscript to Dr Radhakrishnan's essay on Hinduism written for that book. Basham wrote:

We do not intend to disparage the Hinduism of the intellectual and the mystic, the Hinduism of the kind expounded by Professor Radhakrishnan. But let us remember the other Hinduism, the Hinduism of the artist and poet, with its rich mythology and legend, the Hinduism of the simple man, with its faith, its ritual, its temples, and its sacred images. Both are parts of India's heritage, and it is impossible to pronounce objectively on their relative merits or importance; but there is little doubt which has the more strongly affected the majority of the inhabitants of the subcontinent for more than 2000 years.<sup>8</sup>

In his 'Paper on Hinduism' at the 1893 Chicago Parliament of Religions, Swami Vivekananda had taken a much wider view of Hinduism than that evoked by Basham: 'From the high flights of the Vedanta philosophy, ... to the low ideas of idolatry with its multifarious mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists, and the atheism of the Jains, each and all have a place in the Hindu's religion.'<sup>9</sup> The life of Sri Ramakrishna and its portrayal in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* capture this comprehensive compass of Hinduism. But this diversity is not confined to Hinduism alone. Swamiji had pointed out that every religion had three parts: philosophy, mythology, and ritual.<sup>10</sup> He also observed that 'spiritual giants have been produced only in those systems of religion where there is an exuberant growth of rich mythol-

ogy and ritualism.' (3.44) Sri Ramakrishna also has, through his own spiritual experiences, testified to the validity of all these religious forms and expressions as aids to the goal of God-realization, the ultimate purpose of all religions.

### Is the Ideal Practicable?

Vasudha Narayanan is not the first to read a clear-cut dichotomy between the putative philosophy and praxis of Hinduism, and to suggest privileging the latter in order to get a true picture of the ground realities of this religion. Some scholars of religion working in the West, like Frits Staal and Balagangadhara have even suggested that the Hindu traditions being praxis oriented and not belief centred, the word *religion* has been wrongly applied to them.

This privileging of praxis is understandable, for the maze of 'intricate mythology' and 'queer and startling psychology' interpenetrating the myriad forms of Hindu practices are bound to attract greater attention than 'dry philosophy', from both practitioners and observers alike. But to overlook the beliefs, faith systems, and thought processes that underlie these ritual forms is to mistake the chaff for the grain. In cooking the auspicious kind of lentils, young Vasudha's grandmother was certainly moved by specific 'notions' of auspiciousness rather than the nature or taste of the lentils. Similarly, in meticulously carrying out ancestral and death rituals she was only acting out her (and Hinduism's) philosophy of transmigration and life after death; and the presence of her ancestors was no less real to her than the lentils she was cooking. What is remarkable about Hinduism, then, is not the exoticism of its manifold practices, but the absence of institutional indoctrination and dogmatic rigidity that has allowed the flowering of a rich plurality of forms—with allowance for individual choice—all of which reflect certain fundamental attitudes and modes of thought and belief.

The publication of Sister Nivedita's celebrated work *The Web of Indian Life* a hundred years ago had caused a great stir. A whole host

of Eastern and Western newspapers and periodicals were divided among themselves in either applauding or bitterly criticizing the work. To *The Detroit Free Press* it was an epoch-making work, 'for in it the inner life of the Indian woman, the life below the surface, the ideals, the mainsprings of action, the aspirations, hopes and all the mysticism of the East, and the reality of the Unseen' had been 'set forth, as has never been done before, by a Western woman imbued with a spirit of reverent sympathy.' *The Church Times* held a diametrically opposite view: 'In *The Web of Indian Life* the authoress lets herself go, so to say, with entire abandon, to give us a *couleur de rose* picture of Indian life and thought. ... It is all pure undiluted optimism. ... It is the suppression of the other side of the picture that we deprecate in the interest, not only of the truth, but of the cause of Indian women themselves.'<sup>11</sup> Rabindranath Tagore's opinion, as set forth in the introduction to the 1918 edition of the book, is illuminating and instructive:

Because she [Sister Nivedita] had a comprehensive mind and extraordinary insight of love she could see the creative ideals at work behind our social forms and discover our soul that has living connexion with its past and is marching towards its fulfilment.

But Sister Nivedita, being an idealist, saw a great deal more than is usually seen by those foreigners who can only see things, but not truths.

... The mental sense, by the help of which we feel the spirit of a people, is like the sense of sight, or of touch—it is a natural gift. ... Those who have not this vision merely see events and facts, and not their inner association. Those who have no ear for music, hear sound, but not the song.

... Facts can easily be arranged and heaped up into loads of contradiction; yet men having faith in the reality of ideals hold firmly that the vision of truth does not depend upon its dimension, but upon its vitality. And Sister Nivedita has uttered the vital truths about Indian life.<sup>12</sup>

Srimat Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj's erudite exposition of 'Vedanta in Practice', that concludes in this issue, highlights the pragmatic nature of Vedic instruction. Satyakama,

for instance, is the typical marginal subaltern, being of unknown parentage. He picks up brahmavidya, not through recitation of the Vedas, or through explicit vichara, or formal meditation, but simply through the process of tending to his guru's cows. Truthfulness and shraddha are clearly more important prerequisites for brahmavidya than formal instruction about the nature of Brahman. Similarly, success in Purusha Yajna is dependent solely on transformation of one's outlook upon life and one's attitude towards the details of our activities of daily living.

Mahatma Gandhi's programmes of satyagraha and ahimsa are also telling examples of the pragmatic power of ideals that are backed by belief. His concept of trusteeship derived from the Gita provides a practical method of practicing non-possession, or *aparigraha*, even within a consumerist society. His genius in interpreting important philosophical concepts and contextualizing them to current needs, as highlighted in Dr Sumita Roy's essay 'Discourse and Pragmatism: A Gandhian Perspective', was crucial to the remarkable success of his ideas and efforts. Similar reinterpretations through *ijtihād* (individual opinion), *qiyās* (analogical reasoning) and *ijmā* (consensus opinion of scholars) are being evoked to confirm Islamic society to modern life currents, and regular theological revisions have helped Christianity remain the major religion of modern Western society.

To ordinary individuals burdened by the cares of daily life, Holy Mother Sri Sarada

Devi provides the perfect example of how high ideals can be actualized through and amidst mundane chores. This is the theme of Br Ajatachaitanyaaji and Sri M M Barik's article. For one Sarada Devi exemplifying the ideal of Indian womanhood, there are innumerable other women trying their best, knowingly or unknowingly, to live up to their ideals. It is in and through this effort at practical idealism that Hinduism, or for that matter any religion, finds its sustenance. ~

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सोऽहमाजन्मशुद्धानामाफलोदय-कर्मणाम् । आसमुद्रक्षितीशानामानाकरथवर्त्मनाम् ॥  
 यथाविधिहुताग्नीनां यथाकामार्चितार्थिनाम् । यथापराधदण्डानां यथाकालप्रबोधिनाम् ॥  
 त्यागाय संभूतार्थानां सत्याय मित्तभाषिणाम् । यशसे विजिगीषूणां प्रजायै गृहमेधिनाम् ॥  
 शैशवेऽभ्यस्तविद्यानां यौवने विषयैषिणाम् । वाधकि मुनिवृत्तीनां योगेनान्ते तनुत्यजाम् ॥ ...

Pure of birth, diligent in action, rulers up to the seas, with direct access to heaven (the Raghus) fulfilled all scriptural injunctions, were munificent in charity, just in their dealings, and sensitive to circumstances. Their wealth was for charity, words reserved for truth, conquests for glory, and marriage for progeny. Dedicated to learning in childhood, to material pursuits in youth, and to austerities in old age, they gave up their bodies in yoga.

—the ideal of the Raghus in Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsha*, 1.5-8

# Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago

April 1905

## To the Hindus

A recent sermon preached by Dr Lyman Abbott, on the 18th December at Harvard University, has caused so much comment that nothing could have shewn more plainly the absurd narrow-mindedness of those 'Christians' who criticized as they have.

The ancient method of burning a heretic at the stake is outgrown here in America, but the hot fire of words still throws its fierce flames at the poor victim.

The address of Dr Lyman Abbott, which caused so much comment, was in part as follows:

'One day, some years ago, a young man called upon me with a long list of theological questions. He wanted to get copy for his newspaper, and he asked me to answer them. I was bowing him out with a polite declination when he stopped me: "Just a moment, please. Do you believe in a personal God?" "What do you mean by a personal God?" I asked. "Well," he said, "I mean—I mean a big man sitting up in the centre of the universe and ruling things." "No," I said, "I do not believe in that kind of a personal God."

'That notion of an absentee God—an imperial Caesar sitting in the centre of the universe ruling things, whose edicts are laws, who is approached only from afar by men—that is gone, or going. There are some of us who still cling to it, and to whom the removal of that image seems like atheism; some that are trying to cling to it, though their grasp is loosening.

'The notion of a humanized God, sitting in the centre of the universe, ruling things, is gone; and in the place of it science has brought us back this: "We are ever in the presence of the Infinite"; and history has brought us back this: "There is a power not ourselves that makes for righteousness"; and literature has brought us back this: "Spirit with spirit can meet; closer is He than breathing, nearer than hands or feet."

'My God is a great and ever-present force, which is manifest in all the activities of man and all the workings of nature. I believe in a God who is in and through and of everything—not an absentee God, whom we have to reach through a Bible, or a priest or some other outside aid, but a God who is close to us.

'Science, literature and history tell us that there is one eternal energy, that the Bible no longer can be accepted as ultimate, that many of its laws were copied from other religions, that the Ten Commandments did not spring simultaneously from Moses, but were, like all laws, a gradual growth, and that man is a creature of evolution, not a creation. ....

'Yet God has a personality. We recognize it as we recognize the personality of a Titian and an Angelo. Only God is always working, always creating, whereas their work is done. God stands near us. The mother of a deaf, dumb and blind child gives her daughter one, two, three gifts without being recognized. Finally there breaks through the child's intelligence the fact that these gifts, so kind, so loving, spring from the same source. It feels the mother's hands and face, then throws its arms around her neck and kisses her. Even so we, ever in the presence of God, come to realize his proximity and love. ....

'To oppose this irresistible tendency of modern thought is to fight against the very spirit of progress, and those who do so are the real enemies of religion—and by religion I mean merely the spiritual life. The fundamental force in this spiritual evolution is our educational system, our schools and

universities. In every department of our colleges the idea of evolution is inculcated: the youth of today are thoroughly grounded in it. To set apart the religious realm as the only field where the principles of evolution do not apply is folly and can end in nothing but disaster. The soul like the mind, must out-grow the habits of its childhood.'

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The President of the Faculty of the Union Theological Seminary, Rev Chas Cuthbert Hall, in an address delivered at the opening of the sixty-eighth academic year of the Union Theological Seminary, and afterwards at Columbia University, New York City, says: 'Enter the East, the breeding-ground of all the great religions. ... What contrast is here between this passion of religion controlling the East, lifting it above the evil of death, or the greater evil of life, and the apparent drift of the masses of men in Christian lands towards a condition of cultured indifference or suffering, helpless animalism!'

'In the East one finds lands where religion is more than food, more than raiment, even existence itself—the life of the people. The history of the East is the history of its religions. Religion and the East are synonymous terms. By contrast with the atmosphere of religion that pervades the East, the expressions of the religious instinct in the areas of Western Protestantism seem sporadic and occasional. Eliminating for the moment the relative value of things believed in the East, and considering only the psychological significance of Oriental religious practice, the scenes that meet the open-minded observer in India, for example, fill one with the conviction that to worship is for man as normal as to breathe, and that modern Protestantism in Europe and America is not equal with the East in satisfying the popular instinct in relation to God. Go where you will, this conviction deepens. Stand by the Howrah Bridge in Calcutta as the thundering traffic of a modern city resumes its course of a morning. Behold, where, almost touched by the wheels of bullock-carts bearing the bales of merchandise, stands an open shrine of Hinduism, exposing the sacred emblem. Around it is an ever-changing throng of men, the men of the city, men of all ranks and professions, each intent on the fulfilment of his devotions before taking up the common tasks of the day. Crowding one another in the eagerness of approach; offerings in hand; faces aflame with fierce ecstasy; men of liberal callings, merchants, labourers, soldiers bow before the ancient emblem of life, wreath it with flowers, cry to it with prayers, then pass to office or shop or court or barracks, to be parts of modern metropolitanism. Go at sunset into the public gardens of the same city, hard by the bazar of the Mussulmans. See the merchants and the lawyers of the faith of Islam gathering every day in long files for evening prayer. It is easy to discredit their motives, to charge them with hypocrisy and formalism. Yet, as one looks on those hundreds of grave countenances, now turned to heaven, now bowed in the dust, one asks why such practices should survive the commercialism of a semi-Europeanized city if they be not expressions of an instinct having its basis in the facts of nature.'

'All of this popular response to the religious motive in the Orient is very different, I had almost said, terribly different, from what one finds in Christian lands of the West. The East is on fire with the passion of religion. The West is cool and non-committal; her altars do not glow. The gods and the forces of the Unseen control the East, creating that aspect of sublime indifference to things, which, to the keen, calculating materialism of Europeans, to whom things rather than ideas are real, is first inscrutable, then contemptible. The businesslike European living in the East despises the Oriental for a passive dreamer. The Easterner, content with his handful of corn and his draught of water, dwelling in the atmosphere of problems of the soul, aspiring after oneness with the Infinite Essence, looks down with high disdain on the barbarian of the West, filled with meat and wine, whose dull heart cares only for the things that perish with the using.'

—An American Student

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# Reflections on the Bhagavadgita

SWAMI ATULANANDA

## Chapter 11 (*continued*)

**45. O Lord, overjoyed am I to have seen (Your Form) which has never been seen before, yet my heart is agitated with terror; therefore show me that form of Yours. O God of gods! O Abode of the universe, have mercy!**

The strain becomes too much for Arjuna's mind. Even joy becomes painful in its most extreme form and when sustained too long. Hitherto-unknown emotions have agitated Arjuna's mind. An excess of feeling, astonishment, fear, love, awe and bewilder-

ment have exhausted his mental power. Enough! The vision I can never forget. Your true nature I know now once and for all. Now let me see You again as before, as my friend. How?

**46. I desire to see You as before, with diadem, mace and discus; O Universal Form of a thousand arms, assume that same four-armed form.**

We remember that Sri Krishna was the incarnation of Vishnu, the Preserver, endowed with four arms, who came for the preservation of dharma. That is the peaceful attribute of Ishvara, the Narayana who dwells in the hearts of all beings. But on the battlefield, where peace is restored through destruction, Sri Krishna assumes the terrible form of the Destroyer. That is what Arjuna saw. Now he wants to see the old familiar form again, the incarnation of the Preserver, Krishna, the son of Vasudeva. Arjuna did not know before that Sri Krishna was a full incarnation and that therefore He could assume all forms.

Full incarnation means that He had full power. He was not limited in any sense. Other incarnations may come for a certain race or country or to remove a certain phase of igno-

rance, of adharma (evil). But Sri Krishna came for the whole world, for all humanity, to establish Truth once for all. Other incarnations are like one of the Upanishads. Sri Krishna was the whole of the Vedas.

And now comes a word of great encouragement for Arjuna. He was frightened. So the Lord consoles Him. Fear not. Seeing Me thus, you have been highly favoured. None has ever seen Me as you saw Me. It is through My great love for you that I showed you that form.

Why did the Lord show this form to Arjuna? Through His grace, through His love, yes, but that grace and love He extends to everyone. Only others do not avail themselves of it. But whoever unfurls the sail the wind of grace will carry along.

### 47. The Blessed Lord said:

**O Arjuna, mercifully have I shown you this Supreme Form by My own power of yoga—this effulgent, infinite, primeval, great Universal Form of Mine, which has not been seen by anyone else before you.**

How can that Form be seen? I will tell you. First I shall give you the negative side to

remove all misconception. Listen:

**48. O great hero of the Kurus, not by the study of the sacred Vedas or by sacrifice, not by charity or rituals, nor by severe austerities am I visible in such form in this world of men to anyone other than you.**

**P**eople think that by these practices, by their yoga power they can gain Me. But that is not so, It is My yoga power that reveals the Truth. 'Whom the Atman chooses to him is the Atman revealed.' I do not choose these great, self-righteous ascetics who think that since they have done such wonderful

things, they can demand from Me. No, not to them do I reveal Myself, but only to My own children. But I will tell you about that later. Now first see My old form again and be quiet and at peace. Then you will be able to understand that great secret.

**49. Be not frightened nor bewildered, having seen this terrific form of Mine; getting rid of your fear and with a gladdened heart, behold you again this, My former form.**

**N**ow look at Me. Here I am again, your friend, your charioteer. Be happy and compose yourself. Then I will continue My discourse. An agitated mind cannot absorb what is said. It only hears half and forgets again immediately. Therefore first become calm; then you will be able to benefit from My

words. My words are very important; you should never forget them. So pay strict attention. I am going to give you in a few words the whole secret of religion, all that you need know, all that anyone need know.

Sanjaya now relates to King Dhritarashtra what has happened.

**50. Sanjaya said:**

**Vasudeva (Krishna), having thus spoken to Arjuna, showed again His own form; the great-souled One, having assumed again His gentle form, pacified him (Arjuna) who was terrified.**

**A**nd now Arjuna is prepared to listen to Sri Krishna. 'Speak, O Lord! I am all atten-

tion.'

**51. Arjuna said:**

**O Janardana, seeing this, Your gentle human form, now my thoughts are collected and I have recovered myself.**

**W**e hear and we think that we shall never forget what we have heard. We cannot imagine that what seems so important to us now, what seems so deeply impressed on our consciousness at present, will ever escape us. But such is human weakness that either we lose interest, or we have not the stamina to keep up interest, or we forget simply through weakness of memory. We all

do forget much that is worth retaining. Arjuna was no exception. He also forgot Sri Krishna's previous words and so the Lord reiterates His statements in the following verses, impressing on Arjuna's mind how very important it is—what He is going to say—so that he may receive it with an attentive and concentrated mind.

**52. The Blessed Lord said:**

**This form of Mine, which you have seen, is very difficult to perceive; even gods ever long to behold this form.**

**E**n the devas cannot see Me in that divine form that you have seen. You can become a deva, or a god, or an angel, or a bright spirit through difficult practices. But that does not give you My vision, because I do not care for all these practices. I only ask for your love. Love alone can unite us. That is the one natural tie I have with all beings. Love I cannot withstand. It draws Me. And My devotee is so close and dear to Me that from him I

cannot hide anything. He will know everything. He will realize Me in all My boundless beauty. Jesus said: 'Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears for they hear. For verily I say unto you that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which you see and have not seen them, and to hear those things which you hear and have not heard them.'<sup>1</sup>

**53. Neither by the Vedas, nor by austerities, nor by charitable gifts, nor by sacrifice can I be seen the way You have seen Me.**

How then can one see God?

**54. But by single-hearted devotion alone I can be known in this manner, O Arjuna; and perceived in reality and also entered into, O scourge of foes.**

**G**reat is the reward of bhakti. But it must be single-hearted. The devotee must always seek the Lord, must always be filled with love and devotion for Him and for none else. To the bhakta there is but one reality, one love, one aspiration, and that is to love the Lord and to be with Him. He sees naught else, hears naught else. He is intoxicated with the love of God. Wherever he looks, wherever he goes, he recognizes Krishna.

Jesus said: 'If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.'<sup>2</sup> What did Jesus mean? Should we really hate those who are so near to us, with whom we are so closely united, to whom we owe so much? That cannot be. No. It means a transformation of our love, an ennobling of our love. Attachment is not the highest love. It binds. And that kind of love we must replace by true love, the love that makes us free. We must give up binding attachment, but we must cultivate the love of the Spirit, the love of the God in our father and mother and children. He who loves God, loves all. Where is there room for hatred when the heart is filled with love? That is bhakti, to love with a deeper love. Not to love because

you are father or mother of the child, but because God dwells in the child. Not to love father or mother because there is that blood relation, but because God dwells in the father and the mother. That is the grand vision of spiritual equality that embraces all. That is the brotherhood that raises everything to the Christ-level. That is true discipleship in Christ, in Buddha, in all Incarnations.

And remember, this does not mean hating everyone else and being in love with ourselves. No, we must hate ourselves as well. Can anyone hate himself? No, but we must hate or be unattached to our little egotistical self, and then we must love our divine Self. We must gradually draw away from the manifestation, the unreal, and approach the Real, the Spirit in man. That is genuine love. That is unchangeable, undying love. Then the universal vision becomes possible. Then God will be seen as He is, the soul of all things. With that vision the bhakta enters, as it were, into Him who is the Spirit. He obtains union with the Spirit; his spirit mingles with the universal Spirit—and that is liberation.

Freedom is the goal; freedom from bondage, from ignorance, from delusion, from attachment, from desires. God is the fulfilment

of all desire.

And now comes the final question. How should that bhakti, that devotion, be directed?

**55. O Pandava, he who works for Me, has Me for his highest goal, is devoted to Me, is free from attachment and bears enmity towards no creature, he comes unto Me.**

**T**his is the secret, Arjuna. When My bhakta works for Me as for one whom he dearly loves, without expectation of personal advantage, doing everything pleasant and painful alike cheerfully for My sake, ready to sacrifice everything for Me, attached to Me alone and free from all feeling of enmity towards even those who have done injury to him—then he enters into Me. All distinction between us falls away. We become one Being, one Consciousness.

The method seems so simple, so easy, that we cannot believe that that will really end all our trouble. Our rajasic nature tells us all the time, 'Do something great.' But is it so easy to love the Lord? Let us try it and we will see how much is contained in that simple command. It looks simple until we try it. Then we will see how great a task it is to love God and Him alone. It is the message of all prophets. But even great spiritual men could not always understand it. Even Lord Buddha had to discover it after experiencing the futility of other methods. All ascetics finally discover that not their asceticism but love is the secret of success.

This last verse of the eleventh chapter is a wonderful revelation of Truth. It contains the essence of the whole Gita. And the Gita itself is the essence of all the Vedas. This verse is the very jewel of wisdom, the very 'pearl of great price'. It contains the theme that runs through the whole Gita. On this theme the Song Cele-

How should it be applied? How should it express itself? The next and last verse of this chapter is an answer to these questions.

tial is constructed. It is the melody that runs through every chapter. We cannot escape it. 'Work for Me, be devoted to Me, worship Me and unto Me will you come.' We will be eternally united. Make Me your goal and your guiding star. Work with the highest motive. Not as a slave of your senses but for Me. It matters little what you do. Perform your duty, that is all. Do it not to please yourself but to please Me. Let that be your motive. That will make you pure. Thus, your love and attachment for Me will increase. You will be drawn close to Me. You will partake of My nature, which is love. You will not be able to cherish hatred towards anyone. I am your highest goal. But remember Me in My Universal Form. Do not make of Me a little god with human attributes. Know Me in truth, as the Self of all. See Me wherever your eyes wander; hear Me in whatever sound strikes your ear. I alone exist. And this entire universe, with all its wonderful manifestations, is only a portion of Myself. 'Without feet, I go everywhere; lying down, I reach all quarters.' See Me in all and your life will be blessed; your life will be hidden in Me.

(To be continued)

## References

1. St Matthew, 13.16-7.
2. St Luke, 14.26.

If the yogis, with their minds which have been brought under control through the practice of meditation, see some such transcendental light that is without qualities and action, let them see! But, for filling our eyes with astonishment, let there be forever that indescribable Blue Light alone which runs about hither and thither on the sands of the Kalindi!

—Madhusudana Saraswati, *Gudhartha Dipika*, Chapter 13

# Vedanta in Practice

SWAMI GAMBHIRANANDA

(Translation by Shoutir Kishore Chatterjee continued from the previous issue)

## Seva and Karma Yoga

In Vivekananda's sadhana knowledge, devotion, and work assume an inseparable identity. This is not an imaginary attribution of the Godhead to an icon; nor is it thinking of the mind or the vital force as Brahman by taking recourse to some particular attribute. This is the perception of Brahman Itself as Consciousness in all beings and the utterance of the mantras of worship in accordance with that perception. Here there is no necessity of imposition (attribution), for there is a direct encounter with Reality. Again, this is not the worship of humanity, which is in vogue nowadays. For what is worshipped here is not 'humanity' but the Purusha with infinitely many heads, who is inseparable from the worshipper. Whenever Vivekananda is inspired by patriotism, whenever he calls upon spiritual aspirants to devote themselves to the service of all beings, his vision is fixed upon the imminent Brahman. Shankara's philosophy emphasizes the necessity of spiritual practice excluding all else, in accordance with the path of negation. That too attains fulfilment here; for as soon as one seeks to see Brahman in all, the 'allness' of all becomes considerably attenuated. Seeing Brahman, non-different from Atman, everywhere and seeing the non-dual transcendent Absolute become synonymous. When that happens, the effects of seeing the many as a result of duality disappear.

*Yasmin sarvāṇī bhūtāṇy-  
ātmavābhūt vijānataḥ;*

*Tatra ko mohāḥ kāḥ śoka  
ekatvamanupaśataḥ.*

When to the man of realization all beings become the very Self, then what delusion and

what sorrow can there be for that seer of oneness?' or 'To the Self of the man of realization, all beings become the Self. What delusion and what sorrow can remain for the Self of that seer of oneness?'<sup>1</sup>

This union of knowledge and devotion, based on the perception everywhere of Brahman as non-different from one's Self, makes Vivekananda's ideal of service of *nara-nārāyaṇa* (God in the form of man) distinct from [traditional] karma yoga. Swami Vivekananda states in his *Karma Yoga* that absence of the sense of doership and the desire for the fruits of action when doing something is enough to make one a karma yogi; faith in God is not essential to that. To do work prompted by a sense of duty can also be called karma yoga. On these counts Buddha was a great karma yogi. This, however, is only an extreme example. Even if we leave this aside and consider theistic karma yoga, the distinction between Vivekananda's 'path of service' and that form of karma yoga appears obvious. In the Bhagavadgita the best presentation of karma yoga is found in the following verses:

*Yat karosi yadaśnāsi  
yajjuhosī dadāsi yat;*

*Yat tapasyasi kaunteya  
tat kuruṣva madarpaṇam.*

'Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you give away, and whatever you practise in the form of austerities, O son of Kunti, do it as an offering to Me.'<sup>2</sup>

*Anāśritaḥ karmaphalāni  
kāryaiḥ karma karoti yaḥ;  
Sa sannyāsi ca yogi ca  
na niragniḥ na cākriyāḥ.*

'He who performs the prescribed works (*agnihotra* etc.) without caring for the fruit of action, is a sannyasin and also a karma yogi; not he who has renounced the (sacred) fire and actions enjoined by the Vedas (*agnihotra* etc.) and the Smritis (practice of austerity, charity etc.).' (6.1)

Herein we find renunciation of the fruits of action and dedication of all work unto God; it is this that is usually known as karma yoga. Further, when it comes to interpreting the word 'karma', or work, many take the restricted view that it stands for sacrifices prescribed in the scriptures, or philanthropic activities. Swamiji's view, however, encompasses all living beings and all forms of work. Moreover, it does not merely involve the dedication of the fruits of action to God; rather, those that we serve stand before us as God Himself. And the person who serves is also himself Brahman. The agent is Brahman, the material acted upon is also Brahman; the giver is Brahman, so is the recipient; action is Brahman, so are the fruits of action. We can express this through a Gita verse:

*Brahmārpaṇam brahma havir  
brahmāgnau brahmaṇā hutam;  
Brahmaiva tena gantavyāṁ  
brahmakarmasamādhinā.*

'The knower of Brahman sees the offering, the ghee, the sacrificial fire, the performer of sacrifice and the process of oblation as Brahman. To his vision, the fruit of action accruing to a person who sees Brahman in action is also Brahman.' (4.24)

### The Seva Ideal in the Gita

In the Gita, this idea of Swamiji's remains scattered in various forms in different chapters. Further, in the expositions of the commentators the Gita is divided into the traditional disciplines of karma (action), bhakti (devotion) and jnana (knowledge). As a result the form and ideal of service conceived by Swamiji is not easily discernable in all its fullness. For instance, the Gita describes the vision of the Universal Form

of the omnipresent God; however, it does not tell that the vision of the Universal Form is to be taken not merely as a vision, but as providing a suggestion and a method for realizing it in every walk of life. Although the Gita speaks about same-sightedness everywhere and doing good to all beings, these topics do not appear together in the chapter on 'Karma Yoga', and hence one fails to grasp their true import. For instance, it says:

*Sarvabhūtasthitarī yo māri  
bhajatyekatvam āsthitah;  
Sarvathā vartamāno'pi  
sa yogī mayi vartate.*

'He who worships (*bhajati*) Me, who dwells in all beings as the *pratyagātman*, as non-different from his own Self (that is to say, he directly experiences 'I am That'), that yogi, whatever may be his situation, abides in Me; nothing can stand in the way of his liberation.' (6.31)

Here we find worship in the sense of bhajana; but there is no mention of service or of worship in the sense of puja. This bhajana is only a sort of mental perception, as is stated in the preceding verse:

*Yo māri paśyati sarvatra  
sarvarī ca mayi paśyati;  
Tasyāham na prāṇaśyāmi  
sa ca me na prāṇaśyati.*

'A person who sees Me (the Atman of all) everywhere, and all beings (starting right from Brahma) in Me, does not lose sight of Me, nor do I lose sight of him (such a person and I being inseparable).' (6.30)

Further, we find: 'Te prāpnuvanti māmeva sarvabhūtahitē ratāḥ; They, devoted to the welfare of all beings, attain Me alone.' (12.4)

### Seva as Worship: Practical Implications

In Swamiji's perception, the ideal is not the welfare of all beings but the worship or service of all beings, looking upon them as Brahman. The difference in respect of outlook and outcome is tremendous.

Consequently, Swamiji's viewpoint ap-

pears to be more in consonance with the point of view of the Upanishads. But on occasions, adopting the line of thinking of the Upanishads, he proceeds even further. When one sees Brahman in all beings and at all places, one cannot segregate man from man by drawing an inviolable dividing line between virtue and vice. The Advaitin says: Man is already good, he can become better still; he moves from the good to the better, not from the bad to the good. Truly speaking, there is nothing which can be called sin and nobody who can be called a sinner; there is only lesser or greater manifestation of Brahman. Society's duty is not to punish the sinner, but to remove his ignorance and give the inherent Reality of Brahman scope to express Itself. In the field of education, the teacher cannot finish his duties merely by making the student hear or swallow new facts. His principal duty is to appear before the student-God as a servant and remove the obstacles in the path of manifestation of the perfect Atman that inheres in him. With love as his instrument he will be the worshipper of the student-God as the latter proceeds in his path of Self-manifestation. The guru will not direct the disciple along the spiritual path; rather he will be the disciple's companion in his journey towards truth. And here also he will assume the role of the worshipper of God, the disciple.

Likewise, every field of activity will become a temple and every action will be transmuted into worship in individual life. The structure of the temple will vary from case to case and the type of worship also will differ from place to place. Religion will not be restricted to a particular form. The individual has a right to full freedom. Here every individual's religion, or path of Self-manifestation, will be completely his own. What is more, in Vivekananda's view even the apparently impious may, under certain circumstances, become pious. Bhagavan Sri Krishna prescribed violent fighting as duty to Arjuna. And Swamiji told some of his interlocutors that

they would reach God more easily by playing football than by reading the Gita.

This line of thinking had an element of dynamism in it. Swamiji's religion is living and dynamic—it is something that moves progressively to its ultimate ideal. Indeed, in his view this ceaseless progress is the crucial test by which religion should be judged. As he saw it, where there is no activity, there is no sattva guna, but only inertia. For in the present age inertia passes for sattva guna. In the field of spirituality, the acceptance of both the quiescence of Brahman and man's ceaseless quest for fulfilment is unique to Swamiji. Brahman, the Absolute, is present in everyone; there is difference only in manifestation. Everyone will some day or other eliminate this difference and become established in their true Self that is Brahman. At present our duty is to aid in every way and in every field the manifestation of this absolute, omnipresent but yet unmanifested Brahman, and also to strive for the realization of the same in our own life.

Noting the above idea of Swamiji's, Romain Rolland wrote, 'Religion is never accomplished. It is ceaseless action and the will to strive—the outpouring of a spring—never a stagnant pond.'<sup>3</sup> Of course this is a one-sided interpretation. Swamiji accepted nirvikalpa samadhi too. But that is another matter. Taking note of another of Swamiji's thoughts, Rolland wrote:

It is the quality of thought and not its object which determines its source and allows us to decide whether or not it emanates from religion. If it turns fearlessly towards the search for truth at all costs with single-minded sincerity prepared for any sacrifice, I should call it religious; for it presupposes faith in an end to human effort higher than the life of the individual, at times higher than the life of existing society and even higher than the life of humanity as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

### Vedantic Social Order

In Swamiji's view, his cherished social order, established on the reality of Brahman, will

have no room for inequality. Whatever may be the form and condition of society at present, it is bound to transcend its present narrowness on application of Vedantic principles. Further, the principles of Vedanta are not meant to remain confined to books; these must needs be applied to different social fields. India's decline is not due to any deficiency in her ideal; rather it is due to a lack of earnest effort to transform that ideal into practice. The scriptures say:

*Vidyāvinayasampanne  
brāhmaṇe gavi hastini;  
Śuni caiva śvapāke ca  
pañḍitāḥ samadarśināḥ.*

The knowers of Brahman look with an equal eye on a brahmana endowed with learning and humility, a cow, an elephant, a dog and an outcaste (they see Brahman in all these).<sup>5</sup>

*Samāni paśyan hi sarvatra  
samavasthitam iśvaram;  
Na hinastyātmanātmanānam  
tato yāti parām gatim.*

'Such a person, because he sees the Lord as present everywhere without any differentiation, does not injure the Self by the self; therefore he attains the supreme goal.' (13.28)

But in practice we said, 'O outcaste, keep your distance! In the Gita the Lord said, 'Samo'-hami sarvabhūteṣu na me dveṣyo'sti na priyah; I am the same to all beings; to Me there is none hateful or dear'. (9.29) But we created a fifth caste, the pariah, taking these people to be 'moving corpses'. In truth, Vedanta can have no compromise with untouchability. It is a social malady; and it shall be a true Vedantist's duty to rid society of it.

There is no gender difference in the Atman. So obstructing the path of women's progress cannot be tolerated. Again, the Atman is free. So women themselves will decide what they will do and what they ought to do. Men's duty lies only in helping them from a distance by removing their ignorance through education and such other means. Women are but forms of the feminine aspect of God; hence

they are objects of worship (they deserve our highest respect).

Communism and related ideas that we hear of nowadays, had already made their appearance in Swamiji's days. We are therefore naturally keen to know his opinion on these topics. He sought to settle this question too on the basis of Vedanta. The Gita says:

*Ihaiva tairjitaḥ sargo  
yeśāṁ sāmye sthitāṁ manah;  
Nirdoṣāṁ hi samāni brahma  
tasmāt brahmaṇi te sthitāḥ.*

'Those whose minds rest in evenness, conquer relative existence even in this life. As Brahman is the same in all beings (from brahmanas to chandalas) and untouched by their good and bad qualities, such persons abide in Brahman and so (being without any sense of possession as regards their bodies and senses) they remain free from all taint.' (5.19)

Swamiji spoke about this Vedantic concept of equality in many places. He also declared that, whether we wish it or not, equality is sure to make its appearance in future society in various forms. But established as he was in the knowledge of Atman, Swamiji could not settle for economic or racial equality alone. Such egalitarianism may be inevitable under certain circumstances in particular societies, yet equality based on the reality of Atman is what is desired. The nearest approximation to that is cultural equality. It is necessary to establish this kind of equality by manifesting Atman to a greater extent, by raising the cultural level of people in the lower rungs of society. Swamiji was not for equality brought about by levelling down the upper strata, and he criticized it in no uncertain terms.

### Vedantic Unity: The Basis of Harmony and Ethics

Swamiji also wanted to end the conflict of religions on the basis of Vedanta. If Brahman be one and only Its manifestations be of varied modes and different forms, where then is the scope for quarrel? He worked for a human so-

society with its diversity founded on an underlying ground of unity, irrespective of caste or colour. Taking note of this idea Professor Floyd Ross writes: 'The oneness of mankind is something which modern man everywhere needs to learn, if he is to move creatively into one world, where the richness of diversity does not mean an anarchy of foolish competition; but each person needs to find the meaning of that oneness in his own selfhood before he can go far in helping to build "one world".'

India has been aware of the fact of the One expressing Itself through many forms since time immemorial. More recently, Gaudapada too has conceded that if one accepts Advaitism, then there can be no question of opposing other doctrines. In fact conflicts can be resolved on the basis of Advaita itself. His conclusion is:

*Sva-siddhānta-vyavasthāsu  
dvaitino niścītā dṛḍham;  
Parasparaṁ virudhyante  
tairayam na virudhyate.*

The dualists, being firmly convinced about their respective divergent conclusions, oppose each other. But one who sees that Atman alone abides, does not quarrel with such people (for, after all, he has no feeling of separation from them).<sup>6</sup>

Shankaracharya showed that, even when we take the non-dual Brahman to be the ultimate Reality, it is possible to be in harmony with considerable portions of other schools of thought. Swami Vivekananda, in keeping with his guru's teachings, said that it is not enough to merely tolerate other religions; rather every religion must be respected. Although he based the harmony of all religions on the firm foundation of non-dualism, he did not fail to show generosity and respect to different expressions of religion like bhakti, jnana, yoga and karma. He also said that all kinds of disputes can be settled by means of non-dualism.

That is not all; according to Swamiji it is this non-dualism that can provide the surest basis for all ethics. All attempts to build an edifice of humanitarianism on the basis of concepts like the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and the solidarity or equality of all human beings have so far ended in failure. Now has come the time to re-establish the ideal on the basis of the greatness and oneness of Atman—and Swami Vivekananda is its pioneer. When we accept the greatness of the Atman in man, we accord to him a certain dignity irrespective of his race or caste, and humanity can be truly united only on that basis. Such unification will come not as a result of the pursuit of rights and claims, but rather through the manifestation of the Atman in oneself and the worship of the Atman in others.

He discovered that at the root of all human progress lay self-confidence, that is faith in the immortality, immutability, and such other characteristics of one's Self. It is the self-respect aroused by this self-confidence that prevents a man from doing vile deeds and inspires him to noble action.

Here we have made only a cursory survey of the grand plan for the application of Vedanta in human life as chalked out by Swami Vivekananda. Those who wish to know more will have to delve into the source books written by him.

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**T**he suffering of privation is brave but it is braver to feel for others and stint yourself to help them.

—Tirukkural, 225

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# Sri Sarada Devi: A Living Illustration of Practical Vedanta

BR AJATACHAITANYA AND M M BARIK

## Introduction

The epoch-making Great Master, Sri Ramakrishna, the harbinger of harmony of all religions, and his most celebrated disciple Swami Vivekananda have given a fillip to the sprouting seeds of spirituality all over India and abroad. But until the fifties of the last century the life of the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, had remained largely unnoticed as she had spent her years mostly in secluded homely surroundings, away from the public gaze. Humanity is just beginning to realize the unique kaleidoscopic panorama of truth, purity, renunciation, all-embracing love, selfless service and sacrifice witnessed in her life.

In Holy Mother's life we find her as sister, daughter, wife and a spiritual Mother to innumerable people, and in her dealings with all these people, she manifested an ideal, which remains unsurpassed in the history of India.

Virtue and spirituality cannot be taught. They must be imbibed by seeing living exemplars. Holy Mother always imparted moral and spiritual instructions through the example of her own life and action. When we study her life, we find certain virtues standing out prominently as the very essence of practical Vedanta. Herein we attempt to show, through certain examples and in the light of her teachings, how Holy Mother led her life as a living illustration of practical Vedanta.

## The Central Theme of Vedanta

The central theme of Vedanta is the divinity of man. All Vedantins assert that each being has a soul (Atman) or is a spark of the Divine, the Absolute. Swamiji also says that each soul is potentially Divine; the same Spirit

is manifesting through different existential planes. This is the quintessence of the Vedas. So according to Swamiji, it is the duty of every soul to treat other souls as God and not to hate, vilify or injure them in any manner.

In Vedanta life is known as bondage to the wheel of transmigratory existence. This is an undesirable state as it involves suffering and is alienated from the infinite bliss and freedom of Brahman. But we are limiting ourselves by our karma, which like a chain round our necks has dragged us into this limitation. Break that chain, and you are free.

## The Silent Lamp

There was apparently nothing extraordinary in the life of Holy Mother. She was born in 1853 in a poor but supremely pious family. In her youth she served her God-intoxicated husband, Sri Ramakrishna, his intimates and devotees with uncommon fortitude, love, affection and care. After the demise of Sri Ramakrishna in 1886, her main duty was spiritual ministration, but she kept herself engaged in many common chores and household work, thereby transforming every bit of work into an act of serenely peaceful worship. She did all this out of motherly love and affection for all, without any extraneous motive. She treated all classes of people—saints and sinners, the rich and the poor, and even dumb animals equally.

## Adversity, the Test of Principle

Adversity is a great teacher. Virtues are, no doubt, tested in the school of adversity. Adversity mirrors the genuineness of a moral virtue or a spiritual value. Sarada Devi is a shin-

ing example of such virtue. In the midst of trials and tribulations, she always maintained equanimity, poise and grace, the spirit of self-effacing service and all-embracing love, and proclaimed the supremely uplifting power of godliness and spirituality.

Throughout her life she lived among her kith and kin, devotees, and people of varied temperaments. Many times she had to pacify her quarrelsome brothers and mediate between them. She had also to live with her insane sister-in-law and her daughter, Radhu, who too was crazy. She had to put up with the idiosyncrasies of her nieces, Nalini and Maku. Moreover, many completely unknown persons came to her seeking spiritual ministration. To cater to their spiritual needs as well as to their physical comforts was really an uphill task. Her motherly affection never refused to satisfy those demands. Even neighbours and villagers turned to her in their weal and woe. She never turned them away without showering love on them or without showing hospitality to them. In this way, we get an abundance of concrete examples of spirituality in practice in her life.

### **Love, the Keynote**

Holy Mother is herself a fountain of love. She always treated everyone with utmost love. Her love transcended all barriers of caste, colour and creed. She taught, 'Learn to make the world your own. No one is a stranger, my child, the whole world is your own.' Again she said, 'Love alone is the essential thing.' She once told a little child, 'There is no place of demand in the realm of love. If you make demands, you will love more those who give you more and less those who give you less. So your love will not be the same for all.'

Swami Abhayananda recalled one incident about her motherly affection. In spite of the rheumatic pain in her legs, one morning she was found going to somebody's home with a bowl to fetch milk because her devotee-sons from Calcutta had the habit of taking

tea in the morning. This is one of the innumerable instances when people experienced her motherly affection.

### **Same-sightedness**

Mother's infinite love is beyond all limitations. Broad as the sky and deep as the ocean, her heart was open to the oppressed and the persecuted, the untouchable and the outcaste, the virtuous and the vicious. Her boundless love for Amjad, a Muslim labourer, bears an eloquent testimony to this fact. When Nalini refused to serve him food, she volunteered to do it, saying, 'Amjad is as much my child as Sharat (Swami Saradananda).' Later on, Swami Nirvedananda remarked that her reading of both was from an unmistakably superhuman standpoint.

### **Reverence for Life and Things**

Holy Mother used to pay due regard to all life and things. According to her, all life is sacred. So she never treated any object of daily use with contempt and disregard. She reminded others of the sanctity of even inanimate objects and insignificant things, like a broom, for example. She said, 'You must give each one his share of honour. Even the smallest work must be done with reverence.'

### **Work Is Worship**

Mother used to say, 'The purpose of one's life is fulfilled only when one is able to give joy to another.' With this belief, she assisted her mother in the kitchen. She cut grass for the cows standing in the neck-deep water. She would carry tiffin to the day-labourers in the paddy field. When her locality was in the grip of a famine, she served the hungry with meals prepared from her father's stock of rice. At Jayrambati she looked after the comfort of the devotees, worshipped with her own hands and distributed prasad without anybody's help. Once during her visit to a widow home managed by the Ramakrishna Mission in Varanasi, she remarked, 'By serving these helpless

old women, one serves God Himself.' All these highlight her unswerving faith in the dictum 'Service to humanity is service to God.'

### Spiritual Practice

Mother led the life of a sincere aspirant for God-realization. She remarked, 'It is good to be active.' So she practised regularly her prayer, japa, meditation and spiritual disciplines as the Master had instructed her to do. Everyday she woke up at three in the morning reciting the names of deities. The first thing she did was have a look at the Master's (Sri Ramakrishna's) picture. After her ablutions, she roused the Master and then sat for japa. She also did japa in the afternoon, in the evening and even late in the night. Thus her life serves as a model of Vedantic practice.

Her spiritual life was natural, without any outward display of ecstasy, trance or emotional outbursts. But her intimates saw her lost in various exalted moods at Dakshineswar, Vrindaban and other places.

### Compassion and Human Concern

Holy Mother was an ocean of compassion. Whenever she heard about anybody's sorrows and afflictions, her heart bled. Once she initiated a Parsi young man in spite of her serious illness. She could hardly refuse anyone who came to seek her blessings. She initiated many people into spiritual life, not only in the formal atmosphere of her shrine room, but also from her sick bed, on roads and railway platforms, in meadows and under trees. One day she said to a disciple, 'He is unfortunate, indeed, who does not feel my compassion. I do not know anyone, not even an insect, for whom I do not feel compassion.'

### Mercy and Forgiveness

We cannot escape the eyes of society if we commit any mistake or do any wrong. But Holy Mother was all mercy and forgiveness. She once said, 'My child, several among those who come here are up to anything in life. No

type of sin has been left undone by them. But when they come here and address me as Mother, I forget everything and they get more than they deserve.'

Swamiji once dismissed a servant for stealing money. But when the servant met her and explained his miserable condition with tears in his eyes, Mother sternly told Swami Premananda to take him back. Of course, Swamiji did remonstrate, seeing the servant come back to the Math. But when he heard that it was Mother's order, he accepted the servant without protest.

### Renunciation

Vedanta declares that renunciation of carnal desires and service to others as one's own self are admirable recipes for cleansing the mind, inasmuch as these lead to gradual self-effacement, the sine qua non of spiritual progress. Holy Mother's life was an example of true renunciation, though outwardly she lived as a householder. She was neither entangled in anything of the world nor attached to anything. Thus, she inspired young seekers with the ideal of renunciation. In her opinion, one should start practising renunciation from the days of youth. He who is able to renounce all for God's sake is a living God.

Once Sri Ramakrishna permitted her to share his bed at Dakshineswar. During one such intimate moment the Master, in order to examine her, asked, 'Well, my dear, have you come to drag me down to the worldly level?' Pat came Mother's reply 'No. Why should I drag you to worldly ways? I have come to help you in your chosen path.'

### No Fault-finding

Holy Mother was an embodiment of magnanimity. She never found fault with anybody. Moreover, she could not hurt others by her thought, word or deed. She even prayed fervently to God that she might not notice others' shortcomings. She said, 'To err is human. Do not look for faults in others or your own

eyes will become faulty.' An unchaste woman used to visit Mother. Some of the respectable ladies did not approve of her coming. In reply, Mother said, 'Her devotion is real, whole-hearted and sincere. So she is always welcome.' A certain class of immoral women happened to visit Mother. A monk raised strong objection to their visit. Mother replied, 'If they are prevented from coming here, I will leave the place.' Once she remarked, 'The mind is everything. It is in the mind that one feels pure and impure. A man first makes his own mind guilty and then sees another's faults. So do not find fault with others.'

### **Patience and Forbearance**

Holy Mother's days spent at the *nahabat*, where she stayed for many years at different times, were days of real discomfort. She had to move into that rather incommodious room because the Master's frequent ecstasies were disturbing her sleep. She said, 'When I was at the *nahabat* for serving the Master, in what discomfort I had to live in that small room.' Cooking, eating and sleeping—why, everything was carried on in that small room; but she never grumbled, nor was she worried. On the contrary, she would often forget herself in joy in speaking of those years: 'How happy I was then!' she would say again and again.

On forbearance she once said, 'My son, forbearance is a great virtue, there is no other like it.'

### **Absence of Egotism**

Though a good number of devotees paid respectful homage to Holy Mother, she never lost her usual poise and ever remained the

humble devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. In spite of being the Great Goddess, she did not mind plastering the house with cowdung, scouring utensils, winnowing rice and clearing the leavings of the devotees after their meals. She undertook all these household chores, and this can be treated as a lesson for householders. Drawing their attention to the magnanimity of her life, Swami Premananda once told Swami Keshavananda and other devotees, 'What infinite endurance, limitless mercy and absolute absence of egotism!'

### **The Main Melody: Making Everyone One's Own**

Vedanta insists on the unreality of the world and illusoriness of human relationships. But Holy Mother always emphasized the necessity of making people one's own. Vedanta has a higher meaning embedded in *neti, neti* (not this, not this); and that is the affirmative *iti, iti*. Instead of saying this world is unreal, Holy Mother stressed that the whole world belonged to oneself and that there were no strangers. This 'making the world one's own'—the positive Vedanta—was the special mission of Holy Mother's life. It was again her 'Motherhood of God'. She saw not the external man, but the God within. Therefore, her Vedanta is so virile and her *samarshana* so flawless.

Holy Mother had her share of grief, misery and torment, which she never tried to shy away from. She was always unmindful of the storm and turbulence all around. Amidst this, her 'own-making', with its sweet simplicity and spiritual profundity, shines gloriously as a hallmark of practical Vedanta. ~

To me her life is one of intense encouragement—gathering all of us under her sheltering and understanding life, creating new precedents as new needs arise—self-reliant, direct, wise! Oh, what an example each of us can make of Her! She created new precedents, so must we—not Hers—but our own! In no other way can the world's problems be solved.

—Josephine MacLeod, *Reminiscences of Sri Sarada Devi*, 145

# Individual Being and the Universal Being

SWAMI PITAMBARANANDA

While reading Sri Shankaracharya's commentary on the *Mandukya Upanishad* (verse 3), we come across the following observation: 'Otherwise, the indwelling Self, as circumscribed by one's own body, will alone be perceived, as It is by the Sankhyas and others; and in that case the specific statement, made by the Upanishads, that It is non-dual will have no distinctiveness, for there will be no difference from the philosophies of the Sankhyas and others. But as a matter of fact, it is desirable to find all the Upanishads in accord in propounding the unity of all the selves.'

On reading this, a sadhaka who had no knowledge about Sankhya, asked for an elaboration in simple, spiritual language. The question is very fundamental and it needs to be dwelt upon in some detail. We shall discuss it from various angles under three headings:

- (1) The Sankhya attitude;
- (2) Vedantic rishis and their realization;
- (3) The necessary corresponding attitude of a true sadhaka.

## The Sankhya Philosophy

There are persons who are selfish, who have experienced life in the world as full of misery, who believe in rational intelligence and follow the methods of observation and generalization as in science. The difference is that science does not go beyond data collected and verified by the five senses; while these Sankhya philosophers undertake subtler generalizations based on the subtle truths perceived by yogic methods of concentration. Their ultimate conclusions are:

- There are two eternal existential categories—consciousness and matter.
- There are innumerable 'consciousnesses' (conscious entities) called *purushas*.
- All matter, gross and subtle, is unified in

an indiscreet matrix called *prakriti*.

- This indiscreet *prakriti* functions in the presence of the *purushas* and evolves into the world. Its purpose is to give experiences (enjoyment) to the *purushas* and then to release them into a state of *kaivalya* or *moksha*.

*Kaivalya* or *moksha* means conscious dissociation from *prakriti*. Man is miserable because of his wrong identification with the evolutes of *prakriti* from gross matter up to *buddhi* (the faculty of intelligence). So *moksha* consists in conscious dissociation from *prakriti*—leaving it to work for others. Such an individual (the *mukta*) is free from the possibility of misery. The Sankhyas do not know whether there is anything called *ananda*, or bliss, apart from release from the possibility of *dukhha*, or sorrow.

There is no real God in the Sankhya philosophy. They say, 'If God is perfect why should He create this universe? If God is imperfect He cannot create it.' They accept a ruler god, omniscient and omnipotent for all time—that individual, who, instead of enjoying his separation from *prakriti*, identifies himself with *prakriti* in its entirety rather than with its individualized evolutes. So he gets the power to direct the affairs of the world.

So the Sankhyas do not get stuck with the five organs like the scientists, but are confounded by the *buddhi* which results in this *purusha-prakriti* separation. They say, 'The *purusha* has no *sukha-dukhha* (happiness or misery)', and yet they posit the difference in individual perception of *sukha-dukhha* as proof of the existence of (an infinite number of) different *purushas*! This means that they are not able to remove the 'my' factor from consciousness.

## Vedantic Rishis and Their Realization

The Vedantic rishis do not uphold indi-

vidualism, nor are they afraid of misery as they well know that bliss is their very nature. Their findings include the following:

- The ultimate Reality is one without a second.
- It is of the nature of unbroken Existence-Consciousness-Bliss.
- It manifests in infinite forms.
- These forms hide the absolute Existence-Consciousness-Bliss nature of Reality and only then do we call these forms 'matter'.
- While appearing in manifold forms it creates or projects, or rather appears, as an instrument called mind (that includes *buddhi*), which has the property of illusorily splitting all forms into subjective and objective categories. The individual souls (*purushas*) appear different only because of consciousness being wrongly identified with individualized subjective parts of matter, which identification has no basis in Reality. If I am searching for 'my reality', I cannot reach the ultimate Reality unless everything that is 'my' is dropped.

• Bliss is our nature. It is identical with Consciousness, which has nothing to do with any form. As soon as it appears to be identified with a particularized form, the bliss is covered and the unreal, apparent subject-object split produces perpetual tension. This is because whether we possess an object or dissociate from it, we and the object are separate and this separation between apparent subjects and apparent objects produces eternal tension. Tension ceases only when there is no split. This can be achieved neither by denying objects nor by embracing them, because this does not remove the split.

• *Moksha*, or perfection, consists in the realization that:

a) There is no 'matter', everything is but the continually changing forms of Reality, One without a second.

b) The split between subject and object is not real, and hence there is no split in Consciousness. Even the split in matter (forms of consciousness) is caused by the mind, which is

itself an appearance of Reality.

c) The same God, *sat-chit-ananda*, appears as I, you, he, she, it—objects and subjects in this world. All appearances are illusory as God has not changed at all, and in reality God is beyond all forms; hence no split is possible in Existence-Consciousness-Bliss.

d) This God is appearing as 'I' and the 'world', but in *moksha* It shows Itself as without split, without form, as in Sri Ramakrishna's nirvikalpa samadhi. This is infinite Existence, infinite Consciousness, infinite Bliss, the One without a second. This is the source of the feeling of an unchanging Atman in us, this is beyond manifoldness, this is real and absolute tranquility—all other tranquilities are reflections of this on different levels; this is the supreme good and all bliss, this is non-dual.

• There is this God. He (or She) is perfect. He has no motive or purpose in creating the world that gives us the impression that He is imperfect. It is His (or Her) nature to appear in myriad forms. In fact it is the Reality Absolute denoted by 'It', which, without any change, without any split, appears as this phenomenal existence. We then say that there is a 'power of appearance', and we identify this power as feminine; hence when 'It' appears as having a power then It is termed 'He' and the power 'She'. Sant Jnaneshwar declares, 'It is the essence of all zeros (that is, when everything is reduced to zero, you really get to the Reality-at-the-back, which is It); but this power (to appear as the manifold) is conceptualized as a feminine entity, which makes this 'It' appear as 'He' and who Herself appears as power due to His mere presence.'

• We are all one, or rather non-different, in this God.

### Necessary Corresponding Attitude of a True Sadhaka

In the beginning the sadhaka feels as follows:

• I am imperfect—incomplete like a fraction. I have a subject-object polarity. God is

perfect. He is the partless whole. He, or rather 'It', is beyond all polarity, beyond all split. Such a God or Brahman is my Atman. Unless I realize It fully in my being, in my consciousness, and in my life, I can never be at peace.

- God, who is *sat-chit-ananda*, is all-pervading. The 'all' as such is the continually changing, evanescent realm of forms. This includes all the parts and phases of my personality. The feeling of something real, something continuous is only due to His all-pervasiveness. How can I realize this God, who is my own reality and also the one Reality of the entire ever-changing universe?

- All the problems of my life will be automatically solved when I realize God, who is my Self and also the Reality of all phenomena, and who is ever beyond all manifoldness or differences, beyond any subject-object split.

- I do not want anything of this world; I do not want to be attached to any part or phase of my so-called personality. I want my Reality; only the Reality, the One without a second.

For such a sadhaka, hindrances due to maya in the form of hidden wrong attitudes and the like, are removed by the love for the Absolute Reality—whose real nature is revealed in the *rishi-vakyas* (scriptures) and which Itself is God, *ishta*, and guru—because that is much more powerful (by virtue of the power of Truth) than the combined power of all forms of maya, internal or as objects of the world.

The true sadhaka is taught to think and feel thus: 'This body, mind, and the rest, are not mine, the experiencer in me is not "I", but everything belongs to the Reality, the Reality is the experiencer, the experienced and also the fact of experience.'

In the light of the Vedantic truth as revealed by the rishis described above, it is abundantly clear that It is the Absolute Reality itself which is appearing as the sadhaka in one of the illusory forms. As the form is illusory and as the Reality is covered, the sadhaka feels all parts and phases of his personality to be real and belonging to himself, and also the ob-

jects of the world of innumerable types—animate, inanimate, men, women, and the like—all to be separately real, and the subject-object dichotomy created by the mind also to be real. But by the mysterious 'lila' of the Reality, the sadhaka comes across a person (or persons) in actual life whom he at once recognizes as representing the Truth, their life as the true perfect life, and feels drawn to them. He feels 'He or It is my only support, I am supported by It alone and so is the whole world'; or 'I belong to Him and so does the world, and He belongs to me'; or 'There is neither world nor "I", it is all He and He alone.' This starts a process of transcendental illumination of all parts and phases of the personality, transcendental illumination of the entire phenomenon called the world, and transcendental illumination of the illusory subject-object duality. But the sadhaka is still a sadhaka; the Reality is not yet manifested in him. The covering or hiding power called maya functions in him in different ways. (One of the ways of this functioning of maya is the Sankhya tendency to perpetuate individualism and dependence on *buddhi*. There are various other ways in which maya shows itself in the sadhaka's mind.)

But in the true sadhaka's life the ultimate authorities are the *rishi-vakyas* (as explained by the great acharyas), the incarnations, and the guru. Through love for these authorities and detachment from everything else, including all objects and persons and all parts and phases of his own personality—with the knowledge that they are all illusory appearances of the Reality—the sadhaka rises higher and higher, crossing all hindrances in his mind and outside. Depending on the power of these authorities which is constantly pulling him higher and higher, and on their words of advice, the sadhaka goes on revising his own thinking, feeling and willing. He keeps on absorbing the illumination playing in the form of these authorities till he himself finally comes to the full realization of Brahman, the One without a second.

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# Science in Religion

DR SAIBAL GUPTA

I have chosen this title 'Science in Religion' because the two entities are no longer in opposition today, and I want to discuss that as best as I can. This closeness has an important bearing on the human personality in this new century, irrespective of religious, professional, cultural and intellectual inclinations and achievements. I am neither a monk nor a pure scientist. But this knowledge will have significance for humanity if ordinary people like me understand some of it at their level.

My passport of medicine allowed me to travel, live and mix with the common people in many countries. What struck me most was the essential goodness of humanity and that the manifestation of goodness was considered godliness in every culture. There was, of course, evil too, but this evil was always trying to justify itself, thereby making it a quality of goodness—less goodness or absence of goodness. Goodness never needed to justify itself. Why should there be goodness in humanity unless it felt that goodness in the universe around, even when material circumstances were hostile to life?

## The Origins of Religion and Science

Religion or God-perception in some form is as old as humanity. The reason for this does not lie in human inability to explain the natural phenomena of the material world, as scientific materialism would want us to believe, but in the greatest natural phenomenon of his own self. Humans therefore became curious about their own origin, about the origin of the universe—which included all living and non-living objects—and their inter-relationship. They wanted to discover the rationale behind all this, something real and unchanging beyond the apparent chaos. The most intense rational

search went on in the extreme north of India and adjoining Central Asia thousands of years ago. They found that some people pondering over all this and immersed in contemplation developed mental capacities beyond that of ordinary men. They seemed to have gone beyond the limitations of time and space imposed on the imagination and intelligence of man. There was no apparent rationality in this and no route chart. These people, albeit few, seemed to have risen to a level of consciousness beyond the level of human intelligence and human misery. This was called God-perception. The character attributes and personalities of these individuals were described and they were found to be the same in every religion. Some few of them did come down to our level and preach the essence of their perception, but many did not.

Philosophy in its widest etymological sense means 'love of knowledge'. It tries to know things that immediately and remotely concern man and his environment. In that sense science is also a philosophy and actually rose out of it in both the East and in the West. In the west different lines of enquiry branched out to pursue different developments but in India religion, philosophy, science, psychology and ethics were all mingled together in a composite world view and their individual development was pursued within this composite whole.

This fragmentation of knowledge in the West has given rise to a fragmentation of personality of the individual even though there has been great development within individual branches. This fragmentation has worried many thinkers in modern times from C P Snow (*The Two Cultures*) to Fritjof Capra (*The Tao of Physics*) and many others, and there has been a

search for an integrated universal personality in recent times. Is such integration rational and conducive to continued intellectual development or against it? Since Indian philosophy and religion has traditionally taken an integral approach it will be pertinent to judge the question against this background.

### The Empirical Validity of Religious Experience

All modern religions rose on the background of God-perception. To quote Swami Vivekananda: 'Thus it is clear that all the religions of the world have been built upon that one universal and adamantine foundation of all our knowledge—direct experience. The teachers all saw God; they all saw their own souls, they saw their future, they saw their eternity, and what they saw they preached.'<sup>1</sup> But the problem of mankind is how to keep on believing the teachings of one man, though he might have had the direct experience and based his teachings on the language and culture of his times, unless there is access to the fountainhead of that knowledge and experience; for all words become stale with time. Moreover, if the route of access is not rational and charted out, how can man, through thousands of years, follow and verify those experiences and translate them into his life in a changing culture?

Swami Vivekananda has given an emphatic answer to the first problem: 'If there has been one experience in the world in any particular branch of knowledge, it absolutely follows that that experience has been possible millions of times before, and will be repeated eternally. Uniformity is the rigorous law of nature; what once happened can happen always.' (1.127) In India the belief has always been strong that the way is always open for the seeker to this, the highest attainment of life, and it is open not only to the high intellectuals of science, arts, music and philosophy but to every human being in this world.

The next problem is a rational explana-

tion and a route chart. Rationality has many aspects but basically it is a matter of the inter-relationship between the self, the soul or the conscious entity, and the external material world. I see, I smell, I taste, I hear, I touch—therefore it is there. I perceive, I reason, I infer—and thereby I know. All this is perfectly logical. But who is this 'I'? All sensations, all reasoning and all inferences are subject to change like the external material world, but the 'I' is always there. We can take recourse to intuition as in mathematics, the instrument of science, as suggested by Theaetetus in the Platonic dialogues. Does the 'I' work there too? As Sir Roger Penrose, the famous mathematician and physicist of our times, has written, 'the arguments from Gödel's theorem serve to illustrate the deeply mysterious nature of our mathematical perceptions. We do not just "calculate", in order to form these perceptions, but something else is profoundly involved—something that would be impossible without the very conscious awareness that is, after all, what the world of perceptions is all about.'<sup>2</sup>

This line taken from his book *Shadows of the Mind* can very well be a line from one of the Upanishads. Baruch Spinoza, the seventeenth-century Jewish philosopher from Amsterdam, said that every individual is an expression of something infinitely bigger. Man should see himself in the background of this eternity in order to achieve true happiness and contentment. It is our passions—lust and ambition—that prevent us from achieving this happiness. A Vedantist would say that when you get rid of those, what remains is God, the God in you, the same as the God of the universe. Einstein has written that he cannot believe in a personal God creating the world and handing out rewards and retribution, but can believe in Spinoza's God. But all these can be discounted and have been discounted as personal, subjective opinions of undisputedly great people that have not been proved objectively. There is no route chart to go to places they are talking

about and verify their statements. In Indian philosophy these routes were found and recorded.

### The Means to Knowledge

There are definite ways for obtaining knowledge about the Truth: one by having direct perception of the Truth, called *tattvasāksātkāra*; another through rational analysis of the nature of Truth. The knowledge gained by direct vision of Truth or Truth-revelation is looked upon as superior to all other means, and also infallible. The Vedic seers had direct vision of Truth, which they articulated in words to convey to those who could not have that vision. They are called Shruti, because they have been passed from teachers to students through oral instructions. The Shrutis of Indian philosophy remain unaltered and supreme whereas Smritis are later works putting forth new interpretations in different ages. But discursive thought can also go very far and is important as a starting point for people like us. All Indian philosophies are religious philosophies and they do not constitute a monolithic system. Unlike Western philosophy these have not emerged successively from the works of different authors; they developed almost simultaneously as different schools since antiquity.

### The Scientific Framework of Sankhya and Vedanta

There is not enough space to go into the different philosophies in detail. But since this discussion is on 'Science in Religion' or the relationship of objectively derived facts of the material world and the soul and psyche, it is pertinent to mention the philosophy of Sankhya that starts from its theory of cosmogenesis and works downwards to the atomic level to prove that the entire cosmos is a single integrated whole. Other philosophies modify these principles here and there but are basically founded on this solid bedrock of reason. The Sankhya epistemology accepts three means to valid knowledge: perception, inference and

valid testimony. In Swami Vivekananda's words: 'In acquiring knowledge we make use of generalizations, and generalization is based upon observation. We first observe facts, then generalize, and then draw conclusions or principles. The knowledge of the mind, of the internal nature of man, of thought, can never be had until we have first the power of observing the facts that are going on within.'<sup>3</sup>

A scientist will object that no knowledge can be verified without experimental proof. The entire Sankhya doctrine is based on experimentation with the mind. This experimentation is done through different systems of Yoga, and one needs a teacher to instruct which system of Yoga will be appropriate for each individual, and to guide him or her through the experiences obtained therefrom. The three gunas posited by the Sankhya system through whose imbalance and interactions the universe comes into existence are sattva, rajas and tamas. It is difficult to translate these terms into English but, roughly speaking, steadiness, expansion and contraction or indifference, or maybe sublimation, activity and retrogression in different spheres are reasonable equivalents. From this imbalance come the five organs of perception, the five organs of action and the five elements that constitute the material universe by a mechanism of interaction between energy (as wave motion) and matter.

The Vedanta philosophy is the closest approximation to the perception of the unitary non-dual universe obtained by the sages, and is accepted as the supreme philosophy. It accepts the structure of Sankhya with some modification to account for the presence of the soul in the material world. Thus, in Vedanta, the equivalent of the conscious entity, Purusha, is Brahman and of the material Prakriti, Shakti. But together they constitute a single reality—Brahman being inert and Shakti its active manifestation. A seeker can see them as a single entity (non-dualism or Advaita), a dual entity (dualism or Dvaita) or as dual entities

that are essentially similar (qualified non-dualism or Vishishtadvaita). This initial undivided reality, or—to use a term from the general theory of relativity—singularity, divides and subdivides to manifest the universe in which all its constituents have a little bit of Brahman, or the conscious Principle, and the material of Shakti, that acts as maya, or a veil of illusion to cover the conscious Principle. Thus even the smallest subatomic particle can be said to have a minute presence of the conscious Principle—a concept that science would have laughed at even two decades back, but is not likely to do now. This is how the universe, from the smallest subatomic particle to the galaxies as also the life and the human mind contained therein, comes into being. This theory was propounded long before the Big Bang theory of George Gamow. It also suggests that the expanding universe will contract at the limit of expansion bringing about its eventual dissolution, but that the seeds will remain in Shakti, and that these will eventually recreate the universe.

The sequence of manifestation posited by Vedanta is slightly at variance from that of the Sankhyas. In the manifestation of the material world *prana*, or the actualizing force, and *akash*, or space, appear first. In the interaction of these two, great energy is generated, and this leads to the production of air, water and other material elements, and through this interaction of energy and matter creation continues. Energy and matter vibrate and interact in the form of the three gunas, the entire universe being a mass of vibrations and wave motions with different levels of energy alternating between construction and destruction. Two parallel concepts from modern physics and cosmology come to mind: the remarkable insights provided by high-energy physics about the first three minutes in the life of the manifest universe following the Big Bang (described elegantly in *The First Three Minutes*, a book written by Steven Weinberg), and the String Theory of the universe.

### **The Advaita and Dvaita Experiences**

Let us examine the meaning and implication of this Advaita, Qualified Advaita and Dvaita not only in the domain of religion, religious thinking, and cosmology but also in the domain of positive psychology and action. With Advaita perception an individual sees himself one with God and therefore one with the universe. This position is not compatible with survival as he sees everything and everybody as a part of himself and so cannot act. Those that continue to live, do so in Qualified Advaita or even Dvaita. But they keep the awareness of the universality of non-dualism and can bring great benefit to mankind. Sri Ramakrishna used to say to his disciples, 'Tie Advaita to the corner of your cloth and keep on working.' This Advaitic perception then determines one's behaviour and action. Such individuals cannot do anything except that which is for the greater benefit of all, since they have a vision beyond their own individual self. A politician becomes a rajarshi or 'the philosopher king' of Plato. Through his actions he works for the benefit of mankind, since he sees the image of divinity in everything.

Sri Ramakrishna instructed most of his disciples in Qualified Advaita. He instructed the devotees in Qualified Advaita or Dvaita. Dvaita is the path of devotion to a personal God. If the devotee progresses mentally towards his personal image of God through love, devotion and renunciation, he ultimately realizes his unity with the Godhead, the Advaita state. Very often the devotee wants to stay in the dualistic stage in love for his image of God because this is a very sweet and fulfilling existence. In relation to the material world most of us are dualists, for we see ourselves as separate from the world around us. Therefore, for most of us, when we turn to God, dualistic appreciation of a personal God comes naturally. Devotion to Him is comforting and fulfilling, and it alters drastically our relation to the external world. Without that transformation our life remains fragmented, particularly

when we try to intellectually interpret the external world and put our ego before everything else. But ultimately, both reason and devotion need to merge, or else the seeker is likely to be deflected into the wrong paths of bigotry, idolatry, self-hypnotism, miracle-mongering, fundamentalism or mass hysteria.

The West habitually describes the Eastern religious experiences as mystical, as if they were something mysterious and otherworldly. Nothing can be far from the truth. God is real and so are the ways to reach Him according to one's psychological make-up. Renunciation is absolute only for the final perception of Advaita. For everything else renunciation is relative, primarily mental, and must flow naturally in the course of things. A flower loses its beautiful petals on fruition and nobody mourns it. But tearing down the petals can never bring it to fruition. In contemporary Western philosophy a lot is said about the integrated universal outlook and personality but even there some term this spirituality as mystical. Spirituality defines not only an individual's relationship with God, but also with the entire material world. There is enough evidence to show that all of this corroborates the postulates of the physical sciences and gels with scientific culture.

### **The Evolution of Life and Consciousness**

In contrast to physics, the biological sciences have remained conservative regarding the origin of life in the universe. Biology is mainly occupied with genomic research and biotechnology. On the origin of life most biologists still believe that it has no purpose, that it had a chance or accidental beginning, and that the Darwinian evolution then took over. They refuse to accept life as an integral part of the universe as this will allow the unwanted entry of a Deity.

If we look at biology from the evolutionary point of view we shall find a continuous acceleration in the process of evolution, as was

pointed out by Julian Huxley (*Evolution in Action*, 1953) fifty years back; and that evolutionary process is still active and manifest in the psychosocial evolution of man. From the point of view of comparative anatomy there are two organs wherein evolution has been almost linear, whereas in the evolution of other body parts there has been progression and regression; some parts have even become atavistic. The frontal and fronto-parietal segments of the brain, have developed in an almost linear fashion from the primitive brain, even sacrificing the dominance of some of the somatic segments like the olfactory and optic centres. This development of the 'mind brain' has been paralleled by the development of the heart from a one-chambered to two-, three-, and finally a four-chambered organ. This structural development has led to a functional improvement in the heart's capacity to supply larger volumes of better oxygenated blood to the brain. To ensure an adequate blood supply to this more specialized heart an independent coronary circulation evolved as a later development; but it is this specificity of the coronary circulation that has made us vulnerable to heart attacks. Man is less efficient than many forms of primitive life in terms of survival and reproduction, if that is the aim of evolution. Environment is the causative agent of evolution but man can now control his environment. A higher consciousness also affects the sexual and reproductive behaviour of man divesting it of its natural periodicity and giving man a greater responsibility.

Can we not conclude from all this that evolution has so far been in the direction of higher consciousness which can then take charge of its own evolution, thus giving man a greater responsibility for his own destiny? There are contrary viewpoints, but evolutionary biology has already become a philosophy of human behaviour.

Let us now turn to the fundamentals of biology—the discovery of the structure of DNA through X-ray crystallography. The entire ge-

name research is based on that foundation. But a crystal (even if it be a DNA crystal) is not known to have life. Yet, curiously enough, when a DNA crystal is implanted inside a cell it replicates. Such behaviour is actually found in viral DNA and RNA. So what is life? If we say it is DNA or the cell body, that would be tantamount to saying that the copper or iron rod or the acid in a battery is the electricity. In fact Luigi Galvani discovered electricity by observing the twitching of a frog muscle. It may be that life or consciousness is an energy that is manifested by this chemical reaction that we call a cell or a body, as is the case with heat or electricity; after all, life also produces heat and electricity. Our nuclear power stations are far from the days of Galvani but in our understanding of life energy we are still in the days of Galvani. The simile can be extended further because although none of the constituents of a battery is electricity in itself, the latter inheres in all of them in un-manifested ionic form.

## Conclusion

The determinism of the external world is not affected if the divinity is intrinsic to every particle in the universe and in every living being, for then one need not invoke divine causality but only observe a rational manifestation intimately connected with our consciousness. If our consciousness rises to that level we shall feel it; if not, let us be conscious of its presence and pay our devotion in any way we like—to a cross, a sickle moon, a shivalinga, a

subatomic particle, a gene, a note of music, a person we love—seeing the Eternal through our object of reverence and love. It is our mind that makes the world we live in. It is said that pure knowledge and pure devotion merge in the end, a state I can only talk about but do not yet know. Let us imagine that all of us realize that, and then look at the world to find it become heaven, not out there but right here. This is the aim of human life. Even a minuscule drink of this nectar of bliss that has been kept in this world for us makes us see the futility of the material things we chase all our lives.

I first heard Swami Ranganathananda, the present President of the Ramakrishna Mission, as a sixteen-year-old honours student of pure physiology. He told us that in scientific research one has to reject one's pet theories and ideas when they are proven wrong by new facts, and not mourn their loss. If you remain attached to them you do not progress. The ability to do that, to proceed from untruth to truth, giving up one's attachments, is renunciation, or vairagya, without which there is never any progress either in science or in religion.

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2. Roger Penrose, *Shadows of the Mind* (London: Vintage, 1995), 418-9.
3. CW, 1.129.

**A**t present physics or the study of cosmology is raising questions of the origin of the universe in which within the first few fractions of a second of the universe a tremendous evolution took place in which there were originally neither particles nor space nor time nor anything else as we know it. Then somehow it all developed. People take it for granted that during this whole process the laws of quantum mechanics were the same, though everything else changes. They assume that even though quantum mechanics is supposed to refer to nothing but the results of measurements, measurements would have been impossible without anything to measure.

—David Bohm, *Dialogues with Scientists and Sages*, 117

# Discourse and Pragmatism: A Gandhian Perspective

DR SUMITA ROY

The development of Indian philosophic prose in English meant not only translation, which, of course, is always questionable, but also reinterpretation. In the writings of Raja Rammohun Roy, Dayananda Saraswati, Tilak and other key figures of the period, concepts in Hindu philosophy were reinterpreted in terms of the existing cultural and social as well as political situations. Quite often this was not just reinterpretation but some kind of deconstruction, as for instance, in the case of Tilak's concept of karma yoga.

## Gandhiji: The Pragmatism of His Ideas

In this landscape of giving new descriptions and definitions oriented to practical needs of classical philosophical thought, Gandhiji occupies a very important place. Though not a sage like Swami Vivekananda or a scholar like S Radhakrishnan, he is yet unique in making his interpretations part of a pragmatic and highly unpredictable political and social campaign. This uniqueness is a fine blend of theory and practice.

Thus Gandhiji tested his descriptions, which are in very simple and lucid English, in the arena of practice. As I C Sharma says:

Among contemporary thinkers of India the name of Mahatma Gandhi will ever remain high, not because of his philosophic acumen or his depth of insight into the nature of ultimate reality, but because of the simple and straightforward views he preached and practised without swerving from truth at every moment during his long career as a social reformer, a political leader, a saint, a true lover of humanity and an apostle of peace and non-violence.<sup>1</sup>

It thus appears that Gandhiji was not in-

terested in language which is speculative and abstract. For him action embodied in language took precedence rather than language first defining his ideas.

## Swadeshi and Swaraj

For instance, swadeshi did not mean for him indigeneity or ethnic identity. It meant, as he himself put it, 'that spirit within us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings and the exclusion of the more remote'.<sup>2</sup>

The words imply that this kind of description is not taken for granted but subjected to constant revision necessitated by the exigencies of his experiments with truth. He declared, 'If I find my religion to be defective I should serve it by purging it of its defects'.<sup>3</sup>

Among the most crucial insights which held the entire edifice of his thoughts is Hind-swaraj. Obviously, the context in which he used it meant wresting freedom from foreign rule. But this does not exhaust the range of meanings he included. For instance, a revival of the home-spinning and -weaving and other indigenous practices were also included.

Initially, as Vincent Sheean has shown, this idea of first identifying the pragmatics of what swaraj meant animated his consciousness until he could find confirmation for it and 'a practical demonstration upon the most literal stage of human experience, that of economics',<sup>4</sup> specifically economics of the charkha. He never saw the spinning wheel even as late as 1915; yet the irrepressible habit of translating every idea into the pragmatic correlatives never left him.

However, swaraj through charkha repre-

sented just an initial act through which the achievement of economic, political and social independence culminated in nothing less than self-realization or self-mastery. If we take the linguistic analysis, Gandhiji's achievement in this regard becomes obvious. Like the classical system of sheaths, or *koshas*, ideas for him represented a vast spectrum of interrelated realizations. That the range of associated ideas got constricted to merely political independence and never extended themselves to human resource development is a tragedy which we are witnessing today.

We can thus identify one of the features of Gandhiji's prose. We can call this the classical method of multiple levels of *dhvani* of an insight all of which together constitutes a rich complex of human experience. This becomes evident in his formulation of what he called truth. For him this word meant not a definitive and permanently irrefutable fact but an insight constantly to be experimented with in secular and spiritual arenas. He rightly called his autobiography *My Experiments with Truth* and declared that realization of the Truth remained the constant frame of reference for all the activities which he undertook.

### Dharma, Bhakti and Satyagraha

Gandhiji linked this with dharma and his definition of dharma suggests, in his own words, 'a man ... who wants to realize Truth which is God'<sup>5</sup> and truth is exemplified in practical qualities of the psyche such as freedom 'from anger and lust, greed and attachment, pride and fear'.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, even the extremely amoral political scene which we witness today would for Gandhiji never be exempt from the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. One can even risk saying that truth meant shruti which has to take into account the exigencies of smriti, the live existential situations. But one should not assume that Gandhiji formulated an endless relativism of truth. What he sought was absolute Truth, which, in fact, is God.

Coming from a long tradition of Vaishnavism Gandhiji turned even the concept of bhakti upside down. He freed it from emotive sentimentalism and made it a complex culture of thought, will and emotion. An integrated personality is what bhakti in his references meant. So the ritualistic excesses are effectively negated and the medieval idea is imbued with a contemporary context in which even prayer is a precedent indispensable to political action.

But the most significant and the most pragmatic idea stemming from bhakti is satyagraha. As many analysts of Gandhiji have shown, Gandhiji changed the idea from *sadagraha* suggested by his cousin to satyagraha which 'in a large group of related Indian languages plainly says truth-force, the power of the truth'.<sup>7</sup> (Later it was translated into English as soul-force.)

Commenting on this Vincent Sheean says, 'If I may paraphrase the idea a little more boldly than Mr Gandhi himself ever did, it is simply this: that in a sense what a man can do is to declare his truth and die for it. This any man can do; and there is no power on earth that can prevent it.' (Ibid.) He adds, 'Innumerable others for centuries knew this truth but it was Gandhi alone who knew the power latent in that simple truth.' (Ibid.)

It is interesting that like the modern transpersonal psychologists Gandhiji gave tremendous psychological thrust to what may appear a theological faith. Recycling anger in terms of the final aim of truth and one's own self as part of the cosmic system is what this word meant for Gandhiji. Even if it is an essentially individualistic concept it has emerged as a very important way of political resistance by subjugated and marginalized groups. A typical example would be Martin Luther King, who found in satyagraha great promise for his oppressed race to assert its rights. He found it a very important antidote against bigotry and hate.

## Ahimsa

Satyagraha without ahimsa is unthinkable. The one inevitably involves the other. In fact, many have traced ahimsa in Gandhiji to the Upanishadic idea of the all-pervading Self which makes inflicting injury on another as, in reality, inflicting of injury on oneself.

N G S Kani observes:

Ahimsa as the central principle informing Gandhian action, is derived from Atman which is commonly shared by the adversaries and combatants. Himsa results when this common factor is veiled. To remove this veil which is a source of contention, discord, ego-centredness and exploitation, Gandhi used atmashakti (satyagraha) and fostered again the common factor (Atman) which again unites the opponents in a filial bond.<sup>8</sup>

In short ahimsa and satyagraha are systems of interdependence, each strengthening and verifying the other.

In analysing Gandhiji's writings, therefore, we come up against the uniqueness that

all his concepts have stemmed from not only the anxiety to redefine but also the ability to relate them in life to contexts of any variety. This aspect of his prose needs very careful analysis.

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3. Ibid.
4. Vincent Sheean, *Lead Kindly Light* (London: Cassel, 1950), 166.
5. Pyare Lal, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, 2 vols. (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1958), 2.233.
6. Ibid.
7. *Lead Kindly Light*, 118.
8. N G S Kani, 'Gandhian Contribution to the Theory of Politics' in *Studies on Gandhism*, ed. V T Patil (New Delhi: Sterling, 1983), 5.

## A Clarification

In his speech on **Awakening India**, His Excellency Dr A P J Abdul Kalam, President of India, cited Swami Vivekananda as telling Mr J N Tata during their meeting aboard the ship sailing from Japan to Canada in 1893: 'Whatever amount you spend to get steel, simultaneously you should learn the metallurgical science of making steel also.'<sup>1</sup> The presently available research findings on this encounter aboard the SS *Empress of India* provide information only about Swamiji's exhorting Tata to undertake indigenous production of matches instead of importing them.<sup>2</sup> The Tata ironworks, incidentally, were initiated only in 1901.

Dr Kalam also mentions that Swamiji made Dr J C Bose get a patent for his invention.<sup>3</sup> In fact, it was Mrs Sara C Bull who 'took Bose to America to get his invention patented and helped him to write the application. The American patent has her name on it as well as his.'<sup>4</sup> That Sara Bull derived inspiration for all her efforts in India's cause from Swamiji cannot, of course, be gainsaid.

## References

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2. Shankari Prasad Basu, 'Vivekananda, Nivedita, and Tata's Research Scheme' in *PB*, October and November 1978.
3. *PB*, January 2005, 50.
4. Pravrajika Prabuddhaprana, *Saint Sara* (Dakshineswar: Sri Sarada Math, 2002), 391; also Appendix.

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# Parabrahma Upaniṣad

TRANSLATED BY SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

मुमुक्षुणा कर्तव्यानि

Duties of a Seeker of Liberation

सशिखं वपनं कृत्वा बहिःसूत्रं त्यजेद्बुधः ।  
यदक्षरं परं ब्रह्म तत्सूत्रमिति धारयेत् ॥६॥

6. The wise (enlightened person) shall discard the external (sacred) thread, having shaved the hair on the head along with the tuft. He shall put on as [sacred] thread the Supreme Brahman that is immutable (indestructible).

पुनर्जननिवृत्त्यर्थं मोक्षस्याहर्निशं स्मरेत् ।  
सूचनात्सूत्रमित्युक्तं सूत्रं नाम परं पदम् ॥७॥

7. For cessation of rebirth (an aspirant) shall cultivate [ceaseless] recollection of (that is, deep yearning for) liberation day and night.<sup>1</sup> The [sacred] thread is so called because it is indicative [of liberation]; the *sūtra*<sup>2</sup> verily constitutes the Supreme State.

तत्सूत्रं विदितं येन स मुमुक्षुः स भिक्षुकः ।  
स वेदवित्सदाचारी स विप्रः पद्मिक्तपावनः ॥८॥

8. He who knows the *sūtra* is a seeker of liberation; he is a mendicant [monk]; he is a knower of the Vedas and a person of righteous (unimpeachable) conduct;<sup>3</sup> he is a sage (*vipra*), one who purifies a row (*pañkti*) [during congregational eating].<sup>4</sup>

येन सर्वमिदं प्रोतं सूत्रे मणिगणा इव ।  
तत्सूत्रं धारयेद्योगी योगविद्ब्राह्मणो यतिः ॥९॥

9. The *yogi*, adept in *yoga*, the ascetic monk devoted to [the pursuit of] Brahman, should put on that *sūtra* by which all this<sup>5</sup> is interpenetrated, just like a row of jewels well strung (knit) together by a thread (*sūtra*).<sup>6</sup>

बहिःसूत्रं त्यजेद्विप्रो योगविज्ञानतत्परः ।  
ब्रह्मावमयं सूत्रं धारयेद्यः स मुक्तिभाक् ।  
नाशुचित्वं च नोच्छिष्टं तस्य सूत्रस्य धारणम् ।१०॥

10. The sage (*vipra*) who is a knower of *yoga* and devoted to (that is, deeply intent on) spiritual knowledge shall renounce the external (sacred) thread. He who puts on (wears) the *sūtra* that is constituted [as it were] of Brahman-awareness (*brahma-bhāva*), attains liberation. For him who wears [this inner] thread [of Brahman-awareness],<sup>7</sup> there is no uncleanness and defilement (contamination).<sup>8</sup>

(To be continued)

## Notes

1. This deep yearning or longing for liberation is the sine qua non for spiritual attainment. It forms one of the four essential qualifications (*sādhana-catuṣṭaya*) called *mumukṣutva*, required of a spiritual aspirant of Vedāntic wisdom. Sri Ramakrishna repeatedly taught this quality of earnest longing or yearning as perhaps *the most* essential condition for spiritual realization.
2. *Sūtra* literally means ‘thread’. Here, it means the sacred thread (*yajñasūtra*) worn by the ‘twice-born’ (*dvi-jā*)—that is, those who have been reborn, as it were, in Spirit—having been initiated into spiritual life, whose ultimate goal is *mokṣa*, or liberation, from all bondage and ignorance. The Upaniṣad here tries to elevate the aspirant’s spiritual awareness by giving a higher meaning to the sacred thread, thereby revealing its real inner significance.
3. A spiritual person’s conduct becomes a model for everybody to emulate (cf. Bhagavadgītā, 3.21). A spiritual person, therefore, ought to be a person of unimpeachable righteous conduct for he becomes a role model for society. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that a spiritual person is a *jagadguru* (teacher of humankind) and therefore ought to conduct himself with utmost care, lest he should set a wrong example. But then, a spiritually illumined person does not do any act with self-consciousness, for his self has been annihilated and in its stead the Divine Will has taken possession of him, as it were. Impelled and propelled by the Divine Will of the Supreme, such a person always acts rightly in a spontaneous manner. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: ‘An expert dancer never takes a false step.’ The application of this clause for a spiritual aspirant who is on the path to realization is to evoke in him a mood of ceaseless prayer that all his actions and thoughts may be guided and propelled by the Supreme (*hamsa*), rather than by the instincts as in the case of the animal man. This is the significance of the famous dictum ‘*Tanno hamsah pracodayāt*; May that *hamsa* (*paramātman*, or the Supreme Self) impel or guide us [in our thoughts, actions, speech and conduct].’
4. Cf. *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad*, 38.2, 39.7 and 40.6. A *sannyāsin* sanctifies by his mere presence the entire row of persons who sit with him while taking food.
5. The entire phenomenal world. The idea is that this *sūtra*, often called *sūtrātmā* or *hiranyagarbha* in Vedānta, is the supreme *īśvara*, who ties together the world of phenomena, interpenetrating it through and through as the *antaryāmin* (Indwelling Controller or Regulator). The term used for this interpenetration in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (3.7.1-23, 3.6.1) is *ota-prota*.
6. Bhagavadgītā, 7.7.
7. He goes beyond the conventional notion of external purity and impurity. For example, the leavings of others after eating (called *ucchiṣṭa*) are conventionally considered to defile the one who partakes of them. But a person of spiritual wisdom is beyond such conventions and conceptions. There is a beautiful illustration of this in Sri Ramakrishna’s life. One day Sri Ramakrishna saw that a person, apparently dirty and unclean, was partaking of others’ leavings in the company of a dog, putting his arms round its neck in great friendliness. Later on, after a bath in the Ganga, when he began to chant hymns to the Divine Mother, the entire place reverberated with powerful spiritual vibrations. Looking at him, Sri Ramakrishna told Hridayram, his nephew: Hridu, look, this is the state of a *brahmajnāni*, who goes beyond the conventional concepts of purity and impurity.’
8. Because all notion of impurity etc. arises only from the body and the mind. For one who is immersed in the consciousness of Brahman, which is eternally Pure (*nitya-śuddha*), the very concept of impurity gets obliterated.

**P**eople identify themselves with their bodies, think they are bodies. This body-consciousness is sublated by the identification with the Self. He who has realized this is liberated, even if he does not want it.

—*Upadesha Sahasri*. 4.5

# Glimpses of Holy Lives

Sadhu Mathuradas

(Continued from the previous issue)

## 'Seek God Alone'

Keshavananda was a prominent figure in Kankhal. The swami was a man of vast erudition who could count kings and princes among his disciples. Naturally he was influential and had, even in those days, established a prestigious school in the town. All this, however, had been achieved at a cost: the swami had neglected his spiritual life. Moreover, now nearing old age, he had begun to suffer from diabetes. His youth spent in vain pursuits, Keshavananda was compelled to ask himself: 'What have I done with my life?' Though a great pundit, he had failed to get his priorities right.

Filled with deep regret, Keshavananda approached Mathuradasji for advice. But then, saints are not known for sweet words; they tell it like it is. Keshavananda was thought to be highly 'successful' and 'popular'. Mathuradasji couldn't care less what he was. He rebuked the swami unsparringly: 'A sannyasin's life ought to be a living demonstration of the unreality of the world and the reality of the Spirit. But your conduct has been a travesty of monastic ideals. All you have done is painted yourself in ashes and gone about in ochre robes. You have posed as a world-renouncing sannyasin, but have never lived a sannyasin's life. You may be learned, respected, rich, powerful. So what? Take it from me—you will repent every single action of yours. You have eaten poison with your own hands!' Keshavananda left in a sad, sombre mood, but he had learnt his lesson: A monk must seek God alone; everything else is fraught with danger.

## Stunning a Thousand Scholars

There used to be a grand festival at Kan-

khal Sevashrama in those days on the anniversary of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna's birthday. All the sadhus of Hardwar would be invited to a feast, after which there would be a public meeting where mahants of different akharas delivered learned speeches in Hindi and Sanskrit. As can be imagined, on occasions like that the Sevashrama would be alive and buzzing with excitement.

One such meeting was about to begin, when the noise suddenly died down: Mathuradasji had arrived. He went straight to his easy chair without so much as a glance at the distinguished guests. Sitting there, he observed how the whole ashrama was decorated with bunting and garlands. But they did not interest him. He began to fidget in his seat and seemed to be looking for something. Evidently, he was missing his hookah. Mahendranath had anticipated this. He had purposely removed the hookah from its usual place, because he thought it might hurt the sadhus' sensibilities if Mathuradasji started smoking in their presence.

Anyway, the moment Mathuradasji entered the Sevashrama, the sadhus fell silent—like a class of noisy children when their master enters the classroom. That was the effect of his spirituality! One ray of light from the Goddess of Wisdom stuns a thousand scholars, says Sri Ramakrishna. So long as Mathuradasji remained seated in his easy chair, there was an uneasy silence. Then he got up to leave. When requested to have his meal at the Sevashrama that day, he simply said he was not hungry and went away just as he had come.

## 'Know Satchidananda!'

One hot summer day, just before noon,

Mahendranath and some Sevashrama workers were going to the Ganga for a bath. On the way they met Mathuradasji, who was coming from the direction of the river. He was walking briskly, perspiration running down his body. Seeing how dirty he looked, Mahendranath's companions surrounded him and said, 'Mathuradasji, your body is so covered with dirt! Come along with us; we will give you a nice bath today.' As they were coaxing Mathuradasji to go with them, a clutch of curious onlookers began to gather. Averse to making a scene in the streets, Mahendranath tried to cajole Mathuradasji: 'Come with us, sir, please. Let us hurry. It is almost noon.' Perhaps he should have been less insistent, because Mathuradasji suddenly became serious. Looking at Mahendranath squarely, he said, 'No, you don't have to go to the Ganga. You don't need to bathe in the river.' 'Why not?' persisted Mahendranath. 'Ganga is Brahman on earth, Brahman in liquid form. A bath in the Ganga purifies us.' Mathuradasji cut him off sharply: 'Stop prattling "Ganga, Ganga". What is so special about the Ganga? Ganga water and my urine are the same. Know Satchidananda; everything else is false!'

The words appalled Mahendranath. He had great devotion for the holy river. But Mathuradasji had spoken with such intensity—undoubtedly from a very high plane—that he was at a loss how to respond. He stared at Mathuradasji in amazement. For a few moments the crowd stood in shocked silence; then it quickly dispersed. Mathuradasji went his way, and Mahendranath and his friends wended their way to the river.

Mahendranath walked slowly, ruminating: 'Hardwar is one of our holiest places. Lord Shiva and Mother Ganga are its presiding deities. People come here from all over the country to worship them. How could Mathuradasji have uttered such words? Yet, who else could have said it? Had it been anybody else, he would have been chased through the streets and stoned. But when a real saint

speaks, people listen. For saints are the voice of God. Mathuradasji has seen the one Reality behind this changing world. That is why he speaks with the authority of a knower of Brahman.'

Mahendranath remembered an earlier incident when Mathuradasji had silenced a group of self-important pundits with these very words: 'Know Satchidananda!' Taking him to be an ordinary sadhu, they had criticized him for smoking—and that from a meat-eating Bengali's hookah. Their criticism had implied that Mathuradasji had fallen from his position as a sadhu, since he did not observe the rules enjoined on monastics. That day Mathuradasji had shed his childlike demeanour. 'Who is a sadhu? Who is a brahmin? Who is a Bengali? Who is a Punjabi? Tell me, sirs!' he challenged them. As the pundits gaped at each other, out came the words with surprising force: 'Know Satchidananda! That alone is real—everything else is illusory!'

That is the last word in Advaitic realization: our universe, our egos—even the idea of God—are but illusions; Brahman alone is real.

### 'All I Know is Satchidananda'

It was rare to find Mathuradasji in the above-described moods. A man who always sees God is sometimes like an inert thing, sometimes like a ghoul, sometimes like a child and sometimes like a madman, says Sri Ramakrishna. Mathuradasji's natural disposition was that of a sweet-natured boy. A devotee once asked him, 'Sir, how did you attain such a high state? You must have performed severe austerities, practised a lot of meditation.' 'What state are you talking about?' said Mathuradasji. 'I don't know anything. I only roam the streets.' 'At least you are a sadhu. Which order of the Dashanamis do you belong to? They say your monastic name is Shivpuri.' 'No, I am not a sadhu. Who told you my name is Shivpuri? My name is Mathuradas. Nor do I belong to any order; I don't believe in this order or that. All I know is Satchidananda!' ~

## Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play

*Swami Saradananda; trans. Swami Chetanananda.* Vedanta Society of St Louis, 205 S Skinker Blvd, St Louis, MO 63105, USA. E-mail: [vedantastl@prodigy.net](mailto:vedantastl@prodigy.net). 2003. 1003 pp. \$ 39.95.

'*Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play* is a new translation of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga*, which was written in Bengali by Swami Saradananda, a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. This is the authentic, factual, descriptive, interpretive and comprehensive biography of Sri Ramakrishna, the spiritual phenomenon of our age,' says Swami Chetanananda, introducing the book. A massive yet immensely readable book of 1003 pages (with a detailed glossary, a select bibliography and an index), this is, indeed, an unparalleled landmark, a perennial source of unfailing nourishment to spiritual seekers all over the world, whatever be their individual spiritual preferences. In the existing scenario of world spirituality in which inner perfection and poise are desperately, imperatively needed, this saga of a universal consciousness enfolding everyone in his all-embracing love is timely and invaluable.

The reason is obvious. As Swami Chetanananda says, the interest of the book is multiple, far-ranging in its scope. 'The reader will find in this book glimpses of mysticism, discussions of various religious and philosophical traditions of India, accounts of different religious leaders, and descriptions of the social customs, the educational systems and the socio-religious movements of nineteenth-century India,' says the swami, who has already achieved rare distinction as a writer of indefatigable energy and competence. Besides the indispensable source books *They Lived with God* (1989), *Sri Ramakrishna as We Saw Him* (1990), and *God Lived with Them* (1997), he has also authored *Swami Adbhutananda: Teachings and Reminiscences* (1980), *A Guide to Spiritual Life*:

*Spiritual Teachings of Swami Brahmananda* (1988), as well as a translation of the celebrated Vedantic text, *Avadhuta Gita* (1984). The present book is, thus, in a sense, the culmination of his unique contribution to the Ramakrishna-Vivkananda Vedanta tradition as a world phenomenon of epic proportions.

### II

But, then, why another translation when one already exists (*Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, trans. Swami Jagadananda, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1952)? Why not? The *Gospel* translation itself shows precedents. M himself did parts of it; then Abhedenandaji, a direct disciple of the Master, did another that was published from New York; and then there is the definitive one of Swami Nikhilananda's. Now we have another translation being undertaken by Dharampal Gupta of Sri Ma Foundation, Chandigarh, two volumes of which have already appeared.

The question apart, the job is a daunting one. It took 'five years' to complete this Herculean task, 'the most difficult work I have done,' says the swami, owing to 'the elegant and formal language' of the original, its Sanskrit terms and Bengali colloquialisms and, above all, 'technical and philosophical terms that are not easy to translate into English'. Moreover, Ramakrishna's words, 'his colloquial expressions have both extraordinary charm and profound meaning'. Obviously, 'it requires,' he says, 'tremendous effort and skill to express them in English without losing their essence,' to express 'as perfectly as I could'.

The perfection is there for every reader to see. For a book of this nature and size, the lan-

guage is supple, contemporary and immensely—often unbelievably—readable. Considering the complexity of the original, its thought, its argumentative sophistication and richness as well as its intricate and subtle expository nuances, Swami Chetanananda's rendering is transparently clear, simple where necessary but remarkably free from rhetorical flourishes. Wendy Doniger drew a distinction between 'service translations' and 'creative translations by writers of strong original gift'. The former are functional, the latter are masterpieces since they lose nothing in translation. Swami Chetanananda's is, in this way, a masterly translation of one of the two indispensable books of the Ramakrishna phenomenon. Perhaps, this book will be one where future researchers may have to cut their translation teeth if they wish to attempt comparable jobs.

### III

Having said that, I would like to look at the other aspects of the enormous significance that the book in its new translation signals. Classics need re-visioning and periodic translations. Whether we are aware of it or not, the radical changes—cognitive paradigms particularly—set in motion by postmodern trends, engender endless debate about many things which we seem to have taken for granted. One such debate is about the nature of the 'other' cultures, the tools we have to forge to cut passages of understanding between languages, traditions and world views.

Seen against this climate, it seems nothing short of a miracle to me that Swami Chetanananda gave his loyalty to the original Bengali title *Lilaprasanga* and translated it as *Divine Play*. (I have some knowledge of Bengali, very rudimentary, which I desperately acquired to read the *Kathamrita* in the original.) 'Play' for *lila*, yes. But *prasanga*, as my colleague Dr Sumita Roy tells me, could also mean 'a context, a subject, a topic for or under discussion, or simply a narration'.

And, by the 'ordinary magic' of coinci-

dence, one of the areas of (dominantly academic) discussion which is slowly but steadily gaining prominence is the insight of *lila* in the world view. Ever since Ananda K Coomaraswamy's pioneering article on 'Lila' appeared (*Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 61, 1941), several studies are converging on this insight of God as the Divine Player. Varied aspects of this crucial controlling structure are being debated (along with the interesting aspect of 'acting itself as a way of salvation' discussed notably by David Haberman) as is clearly evident in the doctoral work of Bettina Baumer ('The Concept of Lila in Hinduism: Its Theological and Philosophical Significance', Munich, 1969).

Interestingly enough, a volume of essays on this fascinating area appeared entitled *The Gods at Play*, edited by William Sax (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Contributors examine the theological, cosmological, the aesthetic and the mystical aspects, and almost predictably the Great Master appears. In his article on 'The Lila of the Goddess in Bengal Saktism' Malcolm McLean quotes Ramakrishna as saying: 'She is full of Play. This world is her *lila*. She is willful and full of joy.' Playful, Willful, Joyful: the trinity of gunas behind Ramakrishna's 'divine play' is the Mother's play. (Incidentally, Malcolm McLean did a translation of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, in 1983, as his doctoral work.)

'In the world's busy marketplace, O Shyama, Thou art flying thy kites!' says Ramprasad. And another 'kite' which is flying high is of the nature of biography and hagiography. Academics who study religious phenomena—particularly what is called 'oceanic' experience—have in *Divine Play* a daunting phenomenon. In a climate where 'the fixity of any text, of the authority of the author over the interpreter, of any canon that privileges, ... of fixity of language' and, above all, 'of the fixity of the past, of the reality of the past apart from what the historian makes of it and thus of any

objective truth of the past' are denied, we have this biography of the Great Master by Saradananda who knew the West, having been the leader of Vedanta Society, New York. There is something intriguing (teleological?) that the first translation should come from India and this one from the USA, where the great Swami Vivekananda struck the resounding, invigorating note of Vedanta as Ramakrishna lived and taught.

How come in the Great Master's 'divine play' Swami Saradananda was assigned the role of writing the most definitive biography? One reason—however naive one may think it—could be that he was, in his previous role, an associate of Christ. The Master himself declared this. As such he had an inwardness with certain patterns of thought, peculiarly Western, instinctively inherited. And Ramakrishna gave Saradananda the closest association with his (Ramakrishna's) own advent and its myriad aspects which neutralized any privileging of the Western frames.

To put it in another way, let me quote the translator: 'In the materialistic West, a biography or history shows a skill in collecting facts and figures but the spiritualistic Hindus focus their efforts on describing thoughts and feelings in an orderly way. We think that a true biography or history can be produced only by combining these two approaches.' In short, biographical approach—the excess of which is pathological anxiety for 'facts'—is tempered by hagiography. But hagiography and its methods are not allowed to slide into myths and fantasies born out of an equally indefensible craze for lacing the story with mysteries and miracles.

Swami Saradananda himself made a startling revelation; it came about this way: An attendant asked him if he had 'experienced nirvikalpa samadhi?' The swami was annoyed: 'Did I waste my time cutting grass when I lived in the company of Sri Ramakrishna?' he asked, and advised: 'Read the chapter on samadhi in *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga*.

I have not written anything about samadhi without experiencing it.' He extended the revelation: '*Nothing beyond my spiritual experience has been recorded in the book.*' Many could be amazed but the truth of this is, as Christopher Isherwood put it, 'a man like Saradananda could not have made [such a statement] unless it was literally true.' Obviously, this book could quieten the anxieties of writers who look uncomfortably at the allegedly hagiographical books.

That, in essence, is the most significant feature of this biography—its authenticity, the sheer factuality of the incidents (and their implicit inferences) narrated. Perhaps, the chronology of composition supports this: Saradananda wrote Part III first, followed by Part IV and Part II. Part I and Part V came later. Parts III and IV portray the momentous scenario of Sri Ramakrishna as a guru. The reason he chose to write goes beyond the collection of facts in which quest he was faultless. As Swami Chetanananda tells us, 'I have had the privilege [what a privilege!] of seeing the notebook in which he jotted down brief descriptions of incidents along with his sources of information.'

Writing about and evoking the cosmic advent of Sri Ramakrishna requires both sources, facts and figures, and resources that get to the truths behind the facts. The centrality of the book is this and hence, it seems to me, Swami Saradananda wrote these parts in the very beginning of his colossal project.

#### IV

So far, perhaps, I counted the mangoes. It is time to taste and tell what it is that we tasted—the delicious, nectarean taste of 'listening' to what the story unfolds. A fellow connoisseur describes it: In her fine review, Linda Jensen points to Ramakrishna as the discoverer of a 'new truth'. This is, 'As many faiths, so many paths,' which he declared 'for the good of humanity.' In Swami Saradananda's words, Ramakrishna 'was the first

fruit of the universal, eternal spiritual tree of the Vedic religion—the very quintessence of it.' No one need today labour this truth. And, if one is wary of 'Vedic' truth(s), that is only a wrapper you peel off to get at the delicious candy, universally tasty. As Linda Jensen explains, 'He taught us to look beyond our prejudices and see how the Divine Spirit is working in all the world's traditions. When we stop merely professing our allegiance to our own faith and start actually practising it, we begin to uncover the central truth at the heart of all religious life. It is a revelation of love, grace and unity.'

Yes, the 'divine play' of Ramakrishna, as of all prophets, can only be one of love, grace and unity. It is also necessary to remember that the Divine Mother's play is also one of inexplicable imponderables of decay, death and destruction. Both *saumya* (the sublime) and *raudra* (the terrifying) forms coexist. Hence, the great secret of the play is, as Swami Chetanananda's superb rendering shows, surrender.

As an absorbing narrative beginning with Ramakrishna's advent in Kamarpukur and reaching a temporal close at Cossipore, it is a divine romance that rivals any modern narrative. But temporal close is not the closure of the story. Ramakrishna's unique life encompasses

every aspect that an alert contemporary wrestles with, in a life poised between a seductive secular model and a nagging, though muted, call of the Spirit. *Divine Play* as an absorbing narrative is reminiscent of a Purana, but rigorously factual; it has an incisive, argumentative strength of a shastra. But, above all, it is a story that contains the most comprehensive answer to the paradoxes and anomalies of our existence at any given point of time.

In his deeply moving tribute to the Master's *Gospel*, Andrew Harvey said: 'If I had to choose one book to take with me to a desert island to contemplate for the rest of my life, or pick one book to give to a seeker today to help guide him or her into the joys and mysteries of the mystic life, it would be ... *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.' One heartily endorses it—amen to that—but I would also take with me Swami Chetanananda's *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*. (But then, I do not know; I may have to take Swami Chetanananda's rendering of the *Gospel*, too. A wild speculation about such a possibility? Anything is possible in a play, that too the Master's 'divine play'.)

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## Books Received

**The Matchless Weapon Satyagraha.** James K Mathews. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Kulapati Munshi Marg, Mumbai 400 007. E-mail: [brbhavan@bom7.vsnl.net.in](mailto:brbhavan@bom7.vsnl.net.in). 2004. xiii + 229 pp. Rs 200.

Written by a veteran student of Gandhian thought and literature, and selected for a special award by the Gandhi Peace Foundation, this book studies the comprehensive and religious nature of satyagraha. It also examines the formative influences in Gandhiji's thought and concludes that Hinduism was the determinative force therein.

**Navanit (Hindi), vol. 52, no. 10. Ed. Kumar Prashant.** Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. 2004. 208 pp. Rs 20.

Appearing in a new format this Hindi monthly from the Bhavan provides high-quality reading material on social, cultural, scientific and literary themes.

**Sri Ganapati Atharva Sheersha.** Nagesh D Sonde. Nagesh D Sonde, 318 Raheja Crest - 3, Link Road, Andheri West, Mumbai 400 053. 2004. 45 pp. Rs 50.

Mr Sonde, a reputed Konkani litterateur, has produced an insightful annotated translation of this Upanishadic text on Sri Ganesha.



# Reviews



*For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA  
publishers need to send two copies of their latest publications.*

**History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization. Vol. II, Part 2: Advaita Vedānta.** Ed. R Balasubramanian. Motilal Banarsi das, 41-UA Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110 007. E-mail: [mlbd@vsnl.com](mailto:mlbd@vsnl.com) 2000. li + 696 pp. Rs 1200.

This massive book is one in the 38-volume series on the 'History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture' and is an invaluable guide to trace the history of Advaitic philosophy and understand its impact on the Indian mind. The book is divided into three sections. The first section deals with classical Advaita. The second section relates Advaita with contemporary Indian philosophic thought. The third section lists in detail the Advaitic works in Indian vernaculars and their elucidation of this philosophy.

The section on classical Advaita explains the philosophy of Advaita as found in the Vedas, Itihasas, Puranas, Shankara's works and those of his followers. The enormous importance given to Shankara in the evolution of the philosophy of Advaita can be ascertained from the fact that almost all Advaitic works are classified as either pre-Shankarite or post-Shankarite.

It is remarkable that Indian civilization, which dates back to at least 6500 BC, has withstood the test of time and the onslaught of alien invasions, and even today continues to inspire the hearts of not only Indians, but millions abroad too. This uniqueness is due to Advaitic philosophy, which discerns a fundamental order and harmony or rhythm behind the whole kaleidoscopic ensemble of the universe.

As for 'Advaita and Contemporary Indian Philosophy', the author, Ramakant Sinari, has rightly stressed the contribution of Sri Ramakrishna and his illustrious disciple Swami Vivekananda to the modern age. According to Sinari, Vivekananda is the only philosopher to reinterpret Advaitic Vedānta in the most literal, secular, democratic and humanistic way possible; Swami Vivekananda gives a

new turn to the classical comprehension of Advaitic philosophy and adapts it to resolve the conflicts of a person in his role as a citizen, a consumer and as a follower of a certain ideology in society. Through his neo-philosophy, Vivekananda teaches the common man to view the phenomena of success, failure, pains, disorders, non-cooperation, ups and downs of people around him in his mundane existence in the light of Advaita.

Masterly as his exposition is, we do not agree with Ramakant Sinari when he says that Vivekananda could not foresee what science and technology as a global movement could do one hundred years beyond his time, and that his lectures did not reflect his perception of what science as a power of the mind could do to the whole of humanity. Swami Vivekananda definitely foresaw the conclusions of the different branches of science, predicted the ground-breaking theory of relativity discovered by Einstein, and the comforts and curses that lay for future humanity on account of these developments. Swami Vivekananda has dwelt at length on this favourite theme of his, though he may not have spelt it out explicitly in his six lectures quoted by the author. Swami Vivekananda always wanted science and religion to shake hands with each other, he started the Ramakrishna Mission with a prime objective of promoting the liberal sciences, and he inspired Jamshedji Tata to start the Indian Institute of Science at Bangalore which has been the precursor to a number of internationally reputed Indian scientific institutions.

In the third section on 'Advaita in Vernaculars', one is pleasantly surprised to learn that there are hundreds of independent Advaitic works in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Hindi, Punjabi, Marathi, Bengali, Oriya and Gujarati. Some of these are even of pre-Shankarite origin. Apart from these, there are innumerable translations of Advaitic works from Sanskrit into the vernaculars. All these show how Advaita has shaped the cultures and civilizations of the Indian race through centuries. After the spiritual renaissance of the nineteenth century,

Advaita has captivated Western minds also.

These interesting happenings confirm the statement of Swami Vivekananda that Advaita Vedanta would be the future religion of the world.

The attempts of such a large number of well-meaning philosophers would help humanity bridge the gap between the transcendental (*pāramārthika*) and the phenomenal (*vyāvahārīka*) dimensions of Advaita Vedanta and open up the gate for an integral Advaita, which can not only point to a way of life but also solve the day-to-day problems of humankind.

This is a book for serious readers and should be studied in depth by those who are interested to know the history, culture, civilization and religion of the Indian race, and how it has influenced the thinking world for several millenniums.

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**Architectural and Sculptural Imagery of Lauriya-Nandangarh.** *Balarka Batabyal.*  
Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Kulapati Munshi Marg, Mumbai 400 007. E-mail: [brbhaban@bom7.vsnl.net.in](mailto:brbhaban@bom7.vsnl.net.in). 2003. xi + 90 pp.  
Rs 150.

There are many Buddhist monastic sites, stupas and caves scattered across the length and breadth of India and also in South-East Asia and the Far East. The cave sculptures and paintings at Ajanta and Ellora, and the many stupas, pillars and universities in and around Bihar (the ancient Magadha) and Madhya Pradesh point to the widespread prevalence of Buddhism after King Ashoka surrendered to and accepted Buddhism following the battle of Kalinga. His efforts to spread Buddhism to far-off places opened up new routes of trade and commerce; besides, many monasteries, stupas, and other residential sites were also established. People involved in trade and commerce and other social interactions left behind many forms of arts, artefacts, and architecture.

Many such historical sites have been studied in varying details. In the book under review the author has put forth his studies about one such site in eastern India—Lauriya-Nandangarh. As the author says: 'The origin of this research work lies in my curiosity regarding the art and architecture of the Buddhist monastic site of Lauriya-Nandangarh, located in District Champaran, in the eastern state of Bihar.'

The book, a product of the author's dissertation, is divided into six chapters besides the interesting preface. After introducing the topic, the author has presented his study of the architectural and sculptural ornamentation, the animal representations, the structural aspects (material and magnitude), and lastly, a summary of finer details. A comprehensive bibliography and index add to the completeness. The language is simple and lucid, but the text becomes repetitive at times.

The Lauriya-Nandangarh site, which dates back to the Mauryan kingdom of Ashoka (c 269–32 BCE), was located on an important trade route to the neighbouring country of Nepal. The presence of the Ashokan lion pillar and numerous gigantic stupas point to a magnificent centre of Buddhist faith and religion. The inscriptions on these pillars, rocks, and stones 'enable us to know the ideals that the Great King cherished and the religion that he followed. The objective behind these inscriptions was to inform people about his ideas. The inscriptions form a very important part, since its contents reveal the true greatness of Ashoka as a man and as a ruler.' The inscriptions are in Brahmi script. In his records Hiuen Tsang refers to this engraved pillar.

The bulk of the find comprises terracotta objects. The large-scale animal representations include rams, bulls, ducks, and geese. Whether they were merely artistic representations or were objects of worship is difficult to tell. They might bear some connection with the Buddhist religion, as the Jataka stories make numerous references to these animals. The numerous terracotta female figures in standing position—some of them depicting rhythm and movement—are well decorated with ornaments like bangles, earrings, necklaces, beads and pendants.

Along with the many terracotta figures, stone and metal objects have also been excavated; these provide Lauriya-Nandangarh with its own special identity. These metal objects include gold-leaf plaques and silver coins and foils. Copper objects dating back to the Kushan dynasty have also been found. Details have been provided about the sculptural ornaments and metallic artefacts. The metal used is *ashtadhatu* comprising lead, copper, tin, antimony, zinc, gold, and silver as constituents.

All in all a good book; it informs us, in very many details, about a very old archeological site in eastern India.

Dr C S Shah (late)  
Aurangabad

# Reports

## Mission to Start Deemed University

The Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, has accorded the Ramakrishna Mission permission, by a gazette notification, to start a deemed university (under the University Grants Commission Act). The university is to be named **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute**, with headquarters at Belur Math. For the present, the university will consist of the International Human Resource Development Centre (IHRDC) for the Disabled at Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore. Later on, by phases, some other institutions run by Ramakrishna Mission centres engaged in the field of rural development, value education and disaster management, as well as the proposed research centre at Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House would also be included within its ambit.

This is the first and so far the only university institution in India in the name of Swami Vivekananda.

## News from Belur Math

Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the newly built archway at the junction of the Grand Trunk Road and the approach road to Belur Math on 1 January 2005.

## National Youth Day Celebrations

The headquarters and following centres celebrated the National Youth Day on 12 January (*main programmes are given in parentheses*):

**Headquarters** along with **Saradapith**, Belur (processions, speeches, recitations, music and a yogasana demonstration), **Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata** (speeches, music, a question-answer session, cultural competitions and a drama), **Agartala** (a procession and pub-

lic meetings addressed by Sri Jitendra Choudhury, Minister for Youth Affairs, Tripura, and others), **Along** (a procession and street dramas), **Bhubaneswar** (a national-integration camp), **Chandigarh** (an elocution competition, an exhibition and a blood-donation camp), **Chapra** (a procession and a public meeting), **Chennai Math** (a public meeting and a literary competition, in which about 48,000 students from 410 schools of Tamil Nadu participated), **Delhi** (speeches, recitations, music and essay competitions), **Ghatshila** (a procession and a public meeting), **Jamshedpur** (a procession, a public meeting, recitations and a one-act play), **Jamtara** (a public meeting), **Jayrambati** (a procession, speeches and cultural competitions), **Limbdi** (a procession, a public meeting and an elocution competition), **Lucknow** (quiz and debate competitions), **Malda** (a procession, a public meeting, a cultural programme and a blood-donation camp), **Manгалore** (a procession and a public meeting), **Manasadwip** (a public meeting and recitations), **Mumbai** (a procession, speeches, an exhibition and cultural competitions), **Nagpur** (a procession, a public meeting and a recitation competition), **Narainpur** (a procession, a youth convention and a public meeting), **Porbandar** (a youth convention), **Port Blair** (cultural competitions and a public meeting addressed by Prof Ram Kapse, Lieutenant-Governor of Andaman and Nicobar), **Puri Mission** (processions, elocution competitions and public meetings), **Ranchi Sanatorium** (a procession and a public meeting), **Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House** (processions), **Thrissur** (a seminar) and **Vrindaban** (a youth convention and a blood-donation camp).

## News from Branch Centres

A spiritual retreat was held at **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore**, on 18 December

2004, to record the remarkable success achieved by 'Jnana Vahini' and *Viveka Prabha*. 'Jnana Vahini', a project launched in October 2003, has until now carried the message of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda to 278 interior villages in 15 districts of Karnataka through personality-development programmes, bookshops, exhibitions and satsangs with the help of audio-visual aids. *Viveka Prabha*, a Kannada monthly, has within 5 years achieved a circulation of 25,000 copies.

The newly built medical ward at **Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Chennai**, was inaugurated on 2 January.

Dr Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India, Sri Pranab Mukherjee, Union Minister for Defence, Sri Gopalkrishna Gandhi, Governor of West Bengal, and Sri Nirupam Sen, Minister for Commerce and Industries, West Bengal, visited **Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House** on 12 January.

Swami Smarananandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the newly built nursery school building at **Ramakrishna Math, Mekhliganj**, on 18 January.

Sri Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi, Union Minister for Water Resources, visited **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur**, on 19 January and inaugurated the annual celebration of Loksiksha Parishad and the agricultural training centre.

Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, laid the foundation stone for the proposed 6-storey extension building of **Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan** on 24 January (Swami Turiyanandaji's birthday). A meeting was organized on this occasion in which he gave a benedictory address, and Srimat Swami Gitanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Swami Smarananandaji, and Dr Surja Kanta Mishra, Minister for Health and Family Welfare, West Bengal, also spoke.

Five students of the school run by **Rama-**

**krishna Mission, Viveknagar**, were awarded gold medals and 6 students were awarded silver medals at the Second International Child Art Exhibition (2004), organized by Kshitij International Art Society, Gurgaon. The society also awarded the Kshitij Ratna Award to the arts-and-crafts teacher of the school.

### **Ramakrishna Mission Relief and Rehabilitation Work**

During December 2004 and January 2005, the following branch centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission distributed 26,692 blankets to poor people affected by the severe winter. A break-up of the figure follows: Adwaita Ashrama, Kolkata (66), Agartala (420), Along (18), Antpur (400), Bankura (600), Barranagar Math (200), Barranagar Mission (1550), Belgaum (200), Bhubaneswar (1660), Chandigarh (453), Chapra (975), Cherrapunji (1650), Chittagong, Bangladesh (110), Contai (600), Cooch Behar (150), Deoghar (3030), Garbeta (100), Gol Park (365), Ichapur (500), Jalpaiguri (100), Jayrambati (1750), Kamarpukur (700), Katihar (200), Malda (200), Manasadwip (300), Medinipur (200), Ootacamund (300), Pallimangal (100), Puri Math (500), Puri Mission (6020), Ramharipur (500), Ranchi Sanatorium (225), Sargachhi (500), Tamluk (500) and Vrindaban (1550).

**Ramakrishna Mission Calcutta Students' Home, Belgharia**, distributed 9630 blankets, 4457 saris, 3925 dhotis, 22,340 assorted garments, 1500 kg *chira* and 110 kg sugar to 10,725 families of flood-hit North 24-Parganas district in January.

A medical-relief camp was organized by **Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Kolkata**, **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sarisha**, and **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Manasadwip**, during Makar Sankranti Mela between 11 and 15 January in Sagar Island. A total of 3174 patients, including 31 in-patients, were treated. Besides, 150 blankets and 50 sets of clothing were distributed. Free board and lodgings were also provided for 279 pilgrims.

## Ramakrishna Mission Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation Work as of 1 March 2005



Swami Smarananandaji and Cuddalore district collector Sri Gagandeep Singh Bedi flagging off the boats

Ramakrishna Math and Mission centres in India and Sri Lanka continued relief operations among tsunami victims by distributing food, clothing and other essential supplies. Details of relief work during February 2005 are given below.

At 8 different locations in and around Chengalpattu, **Ramakrishna Math, Chennai**, distributed 9140 kg rice, 1448 kg dal, 34 biscuit cartons, 1397 sets of utensils, 213 mats and 507 bed sheets to 914 families. At Srinivasapuram, Chennai, the centre distributed 228 kg rice, 114 utensil sets and an equal number of water pots, garments and tarpaulin sheets among 114 families. At Nagercoil, Rajangamangalam and other places of Kanyakumari district, 1500 families received 16,500 kg groceries including rice and dal. In Cuddalore dis-

trict 6500 kg groceries were given away to 260 families. The Math also distributed 15,134 kg groceries, 2078 sets of utensils, 803 items of clothing and 193 water pots to 2078 families at 8 places in Kanchipuram and Villipuram districts.

By way of rehabilitating fisherfolk who had lost their livelihoods in the aftermath of the tsunami, the Chennai Math provided 33 mechanized fibreglass boats and fishing nets (23 in Nagapattinam district and 10 in Cuddalore dis-

trict) at a total cost of Rs 56.61 lakh. These form the first instalment of the 240 boats the centre proposes to hand over to the fishermen.

Each boat, fitted with a 10 hp outboard motor, cost Rs 1.27 lakh. The work of making them has been entrusted to 9 boat-making units. The entire project is being carried out in coordination with panchayat chiefs and repre-



Happy fishermen launching their newly acquired boats

sentatives of local fishermens' associations, and each boat will be registered in the names of five fishermen.

The boats were given away at two separate functions attended by Swami Smarananandaji, Swami Gautamanandaji, President, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, Sri J Radhakrishnan, District Collector, Nagapattinam, and Sri Gagandeep Singh Bedi, District Collector, Cuddalore. Sri Radhakrishnan said the donation of fibreglass boats was a milestone in the rehabilitation of fishermen.

The Math is also providing assistance to 7 physically disabled persons for restarting their businesses.

**Ramakrishna Mission, Port Blair**, brought relief to 20 places (7 in and around Port Blair and 13 in Hut Bay, Little Andaman). Among the things the centre distributed were 1511 kg rice, 96 biscuit packets, 100 sets of utensils, 1617 men's garments, 1961 women's



Distribution of essential supplies at a camp in Port Blair

garments, 50 sweaters, 62 mosquito nets, 9369 mosquito-repellant coils, 36 carpets and 500 tarpaulin sheets.

**Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Kalady**, provided boats and other equipment consisting of fishing nets, floats, weights and rings to 100 families in and around Edamakkad near Cochin in Ernakulam district. The centre spent Rs 3.68 lakh for this purpose.

Through its 74 camps in Batticaloa, **Ramakrishna Mission, Colombo**, distributed 1200 packages of cooked food, 10,799 kg rice,

3937 kg dal, 134 kg pulses, 2302 kg flour, 158 kg curry powder, 452 biscuit packets, 1646 kg milk powder, 767 kg tea powder, 3075 kg sugar, 261 kg vitamin supplements, 559 cooking vessels, 40 feeding bottles, 222 sets of clothes, 3478 sweaters, 24 bed sheets, 6 mats, 26 mosquito nets, 966 lanterns, 19,060 litres bottled water, toiletries, 5606 notebooks and 521 sets of stationery items among 75,539 people. ~



Receiving rations at a Batticaloa camp